THE JOYOUS FRIAR

A. J. ANDERSON

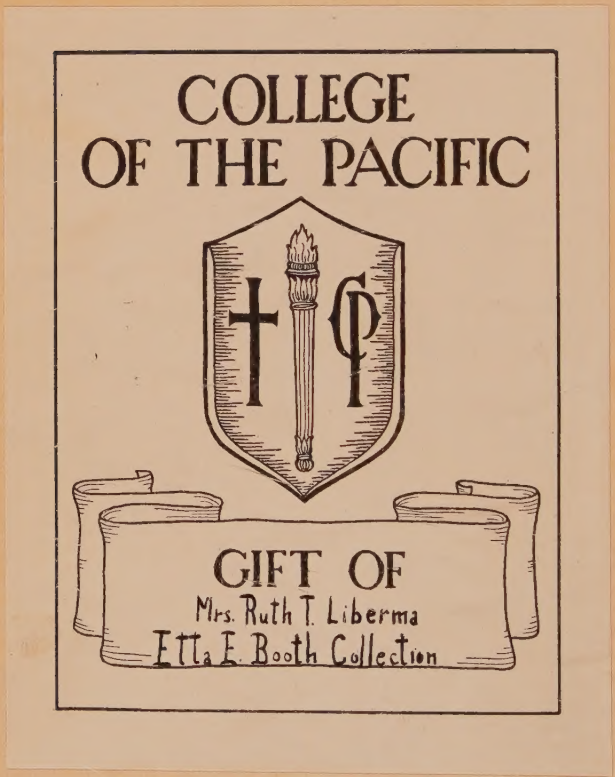
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Photo by Anderson *The Duomo, Spoleto*

PORTRAIT BUST OF FRA FILIPPO
From His Monument Erected by Lorenzo the Magnificent

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

The JOYOUS FRIAR

THE STORY OF FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

By A. Arthur James J. ANDERSON

Author of "The Romance of Fra Filippo," "The Romance of Sandro Botticelli," "The Admirable Painter," etc.

WITH NINE REPRODUCTIONS FROM PAINTINGS

"Fra Filippo was extremely fond of cheerful company, and lived for his own part in a very joyous fashion."—VASARI.

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TO

LILIAN M. ANDERSON,

MY CLEVER DAUGHTER, WHO HAS HELPED ME MUCH WITH THIS BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL.

PREFACE

It is eighteen years since I wrote "The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi." Now, claiming the same artistic right that is conceded to the painter—for he has always been allowed to paint a new version of a theme which he has already rendered—I have written a biographical novel on Fra Filippo that is, I believe, more strictly in accordance with fact.

As to the life of the fifteenth century in Florence and in the neighbouring town of Prato, I re-echo the opinion of that sound historian, Mr. E. G. Gardner: "The *bel viver italiano* of the Quattrocento, with all its loveliness and all its immorality," was "more lovely and far less immoral in Florence than elsewhere."

A. J. Anderson.

Cornwall,
1927.

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INTRODUCTION

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

I

IT is springtime in Cornwall. Down in the valleys the Cornish bluebells are breaking into flower, not one here and one there, but in countless thousands. On the uplands they will blossom later, but there too they will come all together. At the gateways of the water-meadows, where the cows have trampled, the earth was brown mud a week ago; to-day it is covered with fresh green grass. In a few weeks the fox-gloves will begin to flower in exactly the same manner as the bluebells, all together; for the mysterious laws of nature move all the living plants of the same species to blossom at the same season. We can tell to some degree what makes the flowers die down when their seeds have ripened and their task is finished; but, except that their surroundings must be favorable, we cannot tell what makes the bluebell flower in the spring, the poppy blossom in the summer and the heather color the moors purple in the autumn.

Art had been dead in Europe for more than seven centuries, killed by the Teutonic incursion of the Goths and Vandals, when suddenly it came to life and blossomed out most gorgeously. Historians may invent causes for this Renaissance, for, given

historical facts, it is always easy to invent causes which may have produced these facts; but this much is certain, that at the beginning of the thirteenth century art was as dead as the hedgerows in winter, and that towards the end of the same century, when the Teutonic influence had died down and the surroundings were favorable, Dante was writing his *Divine Comedy,* Pisano was carving his sculpture at Pisa, and Giotto was painting those frescoes which have delighted all the true artists who have lived since.

Then, having expended its first energy in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, poetry lay still; and, having expended its first efforts in Giotto, painting became quiescent; for art, like every effort of creation, requires a period of rest before it can again blossom.

II

What was the Renaissance? Common tradition, which inspires the popular lecture and the school text-book, tells us that it was the revival of the arts of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome; but critical examination shows that, working from *Il Convito* to the *Divine Comedy,* Dante was inspired by the philosophy of St. Thomas and Aristotle, whilst Giotto owes more to that love of nature that was preached by St. Francis of Assisi than to anything else. Of course, in the fifteenth century, Italian art learnt much from the Grecian and Roman statues and manuscripts that had just been dug up from the earth or dug out from monastic lumber-rooms, but there was but little of the spirit of imitation. As a matter of fact, it was the attempt to

revive the arts of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome in the latter part of the sixteenth century that killed the Italian Renaissance; for, from the moment that art commences to imitate past ages instead of expressing the thoughts and feelings of living men, from that moment does it become insincere and artificial.

The Renaissance, then, was the revival of the love of beauty for its own sake, expressed through the hands of the poets, architects, sculptors and painters of the period. It was exactly the same hunger and thirst after beauty that, in different ages, has moved Egypt, China, Japan, Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. This *Appetito di belezza* came on Florence in the time of Dante and Giotto and, again, in the fifteenth century as surely as the urge of spring comes on the Cornish valleys.

III

From the death of Giotto in 1336, until the beginning of the next century, pictorial art went backward rather than forward; but, in the first half of the fifteenth century, there suddenly blossomed forth a group of Florentine painters, the chief of whom take a most important place in the history of art, especially as each of these expressed that form of beauty which appealed to his particular temperament.

Fra Angelico, who used often to say "that he who had to do with the things of Christ ought to live with Christ," painted those Saints and Angels on whom his soul was set. Paolo Uccello, who burnt the midnight oil in the attempt to discover "how

nature reveals herself in art and how forms really present themselves to the eye," raised the drawing of linear perspective into a magnificent form of artistic expression. Masaccio, who "realized that painting is nothing else but the simple imitation of natural objects in drawing and color," painted huge life-like groups from which Lippi, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo drew inspiration. Then came Fra Filippo Lippi.

Now, if we would understand Florentine art, we must fit in the successive generations of painters who made her name famous, and this we can do by naming only the chief:—

Giotto	1276-1335
Fra Angelico	1387-1455
Paolo Uccello	1397-1475
Masaccio	1401-1428
Fra Filippo Lippi	1406-1469
Antonio Pollaiuolo	1431-1498
Verrocchio	1435-1488
Botticelli	1444-1510
Ghirlandajo	1449-1494
Leonardo da Vinci	1452-1519
Filippino Lippi	1459-1504
Michelangelo	1475-1564

Of course, there were scores of other Florentine painters who were very great artists; but these few, by the great influence which they exercised on the development of art, as well as for their intrinsic merits, may be singled out as typical of the Florentine Renaissance.

IV

Of the second generation of painters, Masaccio has an exceedingly great reputation, partly because he was the first who painted in the "new manner," and partly because his frescoes in the Carmelite Church of Florence were studied by every young Florentine painter from Lippi to Michelangelo; but, although Fra Filippo's greatest frescoes, which equaled those of Masaccio, were painted in such out-of-the-way places as Prato and Spoleto and could have had but little influence on his contemporaries, yet his paintings and altarpieces which were scattered through Florence had an overwhelming influence on those who came after. Vasari, the artist and historian who was an intimate friend of Michelangelo, says: "To such perfection did Fra Filippo attain, that in his own time he was surpassed by none, and even in our days there are very few superior to him; wherefore Michelangelo not only praised him incessantly, but imitated him in many things."

Such praise from Michelangelo, who lived in the very height of the Renaissance and who had seen Fra Filippo's pictures when they were fresh and untouched by time, speaks volumes; but, if one wishes to form a modern estimate of their artistic merit, one must visit the Florentine Academy where the paintings of the great Florentine painters are hung in their historical sequence: a single glance, and one will see for oneself that Fra Filippo's paintings are at least a hundred years in advance of all that has gone before, and for sheer gracefulness, attractive-

ness and workmanship are equal to anything that comes after.

These Academy pictures however, which were painted whilst Fra Filippo was still at Florence, do not show him at his greatest, for true greatness did not come to him until he painted the Prato and Spoleto frescoes, but they are full of the love of beauty. His Florentine pictures are the expression of a careless, pleasure-loving man who was a true artist, and Fra Filippo had to experience great love, great shame and great forgiveness before he became capable of the deeper emotions of his art.

V

Filippo Lippi was probably born in 1406, and Vasari tells us that soon after his birth his parents died leaving him almost destitute, and that he was taken in by the Carmelite Friars at the age of eight. Vasari also tells us that, when the boy was placed with the novices for education, he showed himself dexterous and ingenious with his hands but refused to apply his mind to learning of any kind; "whereupon the prior determined to give him all means and every facility for learning how to paint."

Here Vasari, who was remarkably accurate about the pictures he had seen and the artists with whom he had lived, but notoriously inaccurate about the biographies of those who had died before he was born, becomes altogether unreliable, and we must fill in the life of Fra Filippo from the records of the Carmine and other contemporary documents.

Fra Filippo was admitted to the novitiate in 1420 and professed a Carmelite Friar on June 8, 1421,

at the early age of fifteen. We can find no record of his ordination; but, since he was appointed Rector of the parish of San Quirico in Legnaja in 1442, he was certainly ordained to the priesthood, probably before he left the Carmine in 1431.

As to his artistic training, he appears to have learnt the rudiments of his art from Lorenzo Monaco and he certainly studied under Masaccio who was painting the frescoes in the Carmine during 1426-27. He was first entered as a qualified "painter" in the Carmelite register of 1430, and permitted to leave the Carmine in order to pursue his vocation of painter in 1431. This freedom to follow his art is not as strange as it sounds, for the paintings of the age were all religious subjects and painting was still regarded as "the handmaid of religion"; besides were not Fra Angelico, the Dominican, and Don Lorenzo Monaco, the Camaldolese, allowed like liberty?

So Fra Filippo went out into the world, still wearing his Carmelite habit.

VI

Of Fra Filippo's life in Florence we know little that is reliable. He appears to have lived in the Medici household, painting the two delightful pictures for Cosimo de' Medici that now hang in the English National Gallery.

In 1434 (when he was thirty) he was commissioned to paint the gorgeous Coronation of our Lady for the altar of Sant' Ambrogio at a price which amounts to over 5,000 dollars, or £1,000, present value, and in 1437 he commenced the panel

for Santo Spirito, now in the Louvre—which latter picture, as a contemporary writes: "He cannot finish in five years, though he should toil at it day and night, so great a work is it."

Altogether, working in the intractable medium of tempora and executing a vast number of pictures, Fra Filippo must have painted as long as daylight lasted; then, tired out with work and having no taste for poetry or philosophy or scholarship, he must have taken his recreation as most artists do now. "Fra Filippo," writes Vasari, "was extremely fond of cheerful company, and lived for his own part in a very joyous fashion."

But, in spite of the large sums which he received for his paintings, we find that Fra Filippo was in a continual state of financial difficulty. For instance, he writes to Pietro de' Medici in the August of 1439, when he was busy with the important altarpieces for Sant' Ambrogio and Santo Spirito: "It is clear that I am the poorest friar in all Florence. God has left me with six unmarried nieces, infirm and helpless, and the little they have on earth comes to them from me. If you could only let me have a little corn and wine at your house, selling it to me on credit and putting it to my account, it would be a great joy for me. I implore you with tears in my eyes to grant me this favor, so that if I have to go away I may leave these poor children provided for."

This state of involuntary poverty was originally due to the excessive delay in payment by his patrons; for instance he had commenced the Sant' Ambrogio altarpiece in 1437 and finished it in 1441, and he was not paid until 1447. But we must admit that,

later, it was due to his extreme improvidence—when was a pleasure-loving artist ever provident?—and also his entire lack of business instinct. Nor can we take Vasari's aspersions against his moral conduct during his Florentine period any more seriously than the charges of immorality which Captain Wright has lately brought against William Ewart Gladstone. What happened afterwards at Prato, joined to his gay and careless manner of life when he was in Florence, is enough to account for anything that Vasari may have written.

Judging from the portrait bust, executed under the supervision of his son Filippino in Spoleto, which is the only authentic portrait in existence, Fra Filippo must have been an exceedingly handsome man, with a face that was full of intelligence, charm and sympathy, and marked with that sense of kindly humor which is irresistible.

In 1452 Fra Filippo left for Prato, where he had undertaken to adorn the chief church of the town with frescoes, and where the events which changed him into one of the greatest painters of the century happened. If these events should read like a novellino of the Quattrocento, it serves to show that the old Italian romances were true to life, not that the following account, which is built entirely from records of the period, is in any way exaggerated.

THE JOYOUS FRIAR

CHAPTER I

THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT

I

THE February sun was low down, shining through the west window of the great church of Prato, illuminating the sanctuary frescoes that were already finished and leaving the unfinished fresco, upon which the painters were still working, in a soft half-light.

Messer Geminiano Inghirami, the *Proposto* or spiritual governor of Prato, had seated himself in a corner of the nave so that he might watch the painters at their work, and judge the effect which the third of the three large frescoes would have on the epistle side of the choir when completed.

The subject of the fresco that was now more than half finished represented the dancing of Salome before King Herod; and, as the *proposto* looked at the graceful movements of the dancing girl—her figure, which was already painted, seemed to be moving before his eyes—he understood for the first time the impulse which had prompted Herod to promise anything as the reward for such incomparable grace of movement.

One of the workmen shifted some steps which

had hidden a portion of the picture, and the *proposto* blinked his eyes. There, in the part which was already painted, was the Daughter of Herodias dancing before her mother and King Herod, finished and complete; here, in the part that was now being painted, there was a continuation of the same table in the same banqueting-hall, and the same girl was offering the Baptist's head, all gory and pitiful, to what would presently be the figure of her inhuman mother. Two Salomes in the same picture: this was indeed bewildering!

Then a reason for this apparent confusion of thought came to Messer Inghirami, for he was a very keen and clever old man, and, getting up from his seat, he stole silently towards the choir so that he might test his solution of the problem.

Thank God, he was right! When he had been sitting far away in the body of the church, he had seen the picture as a whole, and the introduction of two distinct incidents within the same pictured room had been very puzzling; but, when he came close to the fresco, his eyes were unable to take in the whole of the huge fresco at once, but must start with the left-hand portion. Then, as his eye traveled from left to right, as the eyesight will, the subject was gradually unrolled before him, showing the tragedy from start to finish—first the dancing, then the terrible crime which followed the dancing. And Messer Geminiano Inghirami, spiritual governor of Prato, nodded his head in appreciation of the genius who had foreseen such an effect.

A tall friar, wearing the brown habit of a Carmelite, descended from the scaffolding upon which he had been finishing one of the minor figures, and the

proposto slipped back to his seat in the nave; for he was a very courteous old gentleman, who did not hold with interrupting a painter at his work. The tall friar began to talk forcibly to a younger friar who was painting at the bottom of the fresco, and the *proposto* chuckled at the outspoken nature of his language.

II

Fra Filippo got down from the scaffolding upon which he had been finishing one of the figures at the banqueting-table, and regarded his work with satisfaction. Next he proceeded to examine a patch of moist plaster at the bottom of the fresco upon which the younger friar had been painting. He stepped back from the picture, holding up his hand so as to keep away the sunshine, and tilted his head, first on one side, then on the other. He went close up to the painting, peering right into it, and again stepped back. At last he turned to the younger friar, speaking sharply.

"Diamante," he said, "that patch of drapery which you have just finished must come out."

Fra Diamante straightened himself, and proceeded to inspect the offending patch of painted plaster in exactly the same way as the elder friar had done, first from a distance, afterwards close up.

"Filippo," he answered, frowning, "I can see nothing wrong with those folds of drapery. They are exactly as you drew them in the cartoon."

Then Fra Filippo exploded. "Body of Bacchus!" he cried. "There, on the left, is the dancing girl as I painted her, with her drapery as light and diaphanous as air. Here, on the right, is the same

dancing girl in the same gown offering the head of Saint John Baptist to her mother, as you have painted her, with her drapery as heavy and lifeless as stone. Did I draw the drapery as if it had been starched and then bunched round the legs of the poor young girl? Tell me that!"

"Yesterday," grumbled Fra Diamante, "you told me that my drapery was like thick wool and you had the patch cut out; to-day you tell me that it is like starched linen. There's no pleasing you."

"Pumpkin-head," snapped Fra Filippo, "you've got some fine-spun linen to paint from; you've got my dancing girl as your guide; and, if I have that infernal patch of plaster cut out twenty thousand times, you shall go on until you get it right. I am responsible for your instruction; and, in the name of all the Saints, I will make you learn."

Fra Diamante flushed angrily. But presently he calmed himself with the thought that a day's extra work on a painting, let alone twenty thousand days, would mean so much less profit for Fra Filippo and, indirectly, so much less profit for himself.

"Filippo," he suggested persuasively, "work as I will, I can never please you with my drapery. Now, suppose you go over it to-morrow *a secco*. A few touches from your brush will put it right and save a day's work."

"And have all my touches flake off within a dozen years?" fumed Fra Filippo. "May ten thousand fiends fly away with you!" And he fussed over to where his journeyman, Jacopo, was waiting for him with a bowl of water and a towel.

For the whole art of securing permanence in fresco-work lies in having the patch of plaster that

is to be painted laid fresh, and in painting while it is still damp. Otherwise, instead of soaking into the drying plaster and becoming part of it, the paint will lie on the surface and eventually flake off. Fra Diamante, who had more than three years' experience of the Prato frescoes, knew this as well as Fra Filippo.

Then, having washed his hands and having put on the full white cloak which the Carmelite wears over his brown habit, Fra Filippo took a stick of charcoal, drew a line round the offending patch as a sign to the plasterers that they should cut it out and relay it first thing in the morning, and prepared to leave the *pieve*. He was not feeling pleased with his assistant, Fra Diamante.

III

As Fra Filippo approached the *pieve* door, a tall and dignified personage joined him. The friar bent his head in greeting, and the pair left the church together.

In this early spring of 1456, Fra Filippo Lippi must have been an exceedingly attractive man. We have what was his probable portrait in the figure of the young religious of about thirty-four, which he had painted in the Sant' Ambrogio "Coronation of our Lady." * We have his authentic portrait in

* In 1909, in the *Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi,* I pointed out that the old secular priest on the right hand of the picture in the Sant' Ambrogio "Coronation," whom art critics, from Dr. Cinelli to Mr. Strutt, had regarded as Fra Filippo, could not possibly have been the Carmelite Friar, who was then but thirty-four. In 1911, Mr. Montgomery Carmichael proved beyond contention that this old secular ecclesiastic was Mgr. Francis Maringhi, the donor of the altarpiece and the benefactor of the church. And Mr. Car-

the marble bust which his son Filippino Lippi designed in Spoleto Cathedral after his death. But, as he appeared in 1456, a man of forty-nine, we have no record.

However, taking one portrait with another, the discontented droop of the mouth, which had given a supercilious expression to the exceedingly handsome young friar of the Sant' Ambrogio altarpiece, must have disappeared by now, and the generous and sympathetic expression, with its strong sense of humor, which wins our hearts in the memorial bust of Spoleto, must have begun to take its place. Anyhow, his face was intensely keen and full of artistic impulse; it was a face which must attract and rivet the attention; and, although, thanks to the attention of the Vicar General of Florence, Fra Filippo now walked slowly and with difficulty, his figure remained tall, upstanding and shapely until his death.

"How goes your painting of the Baptist, Fra Filippo?" asked Messer Geminiano Inghirami, with that gracious dignity which distinguishes the Tuscan of good family.

"His head is now being presented to Herodias on a charger, eminence," answered Fra Filippo.

"So I have just seen." And the *Proposto* of Prato sighed, for he was taking a very lively interest in the frescoes, which were beginning to make his church beautiful, and this rendering of the death of Saint John Baptist moved him strongly. *"Posu-*

michael and myself, judging from the marble bust which Filippino carved in Spoleto Cathedral, decided that the traditional portrait of Fra Filippo in the Sant' Ambrogio "Coronation" must have been that of the comparatively young friar high up on the left of the picture and standing next our Lady.

isti, Domine, in capite ejus coronam de lapide pretioso!" he murmured. "And this head, crowned with the jewels of righteousness, to be served up by a common dancing girl!"

"The dancing girl was a princess, eminence."

"Madonna! The more noble her birth, the greater her degradation!" He thought for a moment. "And yet, Fra Filippo, it was a fitting end for him who first preached the Crucified."

The friar mumbled something; for he regarded his art from the descriptive and decorative, not from the religious, aspect.

"The work of a painter," continued the *proposto*, "at least the work of a painter who undertakes such subjects as you have undertaken, must be a continual life of meditation. Men say that Fra Angelico of Fiesole always mixed his pigments with prayers."

Fra Filippo's eyes twinkled. "When I met him two years ago at Perugia, eminence, he was mixing his pigments with the white of an egg. Perchance he was suffering from spiritual dryness at the time, and his prayers were not sufficiently fluid to mix with paint."

The *proposto* smiled, but his voice was grave. "At any rate," he said, "Fra Angelico is now mixing his prayers with praise, and enjoying a vision that is far more beautiful than any picture he ever imagined." And, linking his arm in that of Fra Filippo, he began to walk up and down before the front of the *pieve*.

"Do you mean to make Fra Diamante keep on painting that gown of Salome until you are satisfied?" he asked, presently.

"Eh? Then you were in the *pieve* when I quarreled with Diamante?"

"Obviously."

Fra Filippo chuckled. "Perhaps I shall forgive him to-morrow or the next day and paint the gown myself: one cannot be angry for ever. Besides, since the plasterers cannot lay on the next patch of plaster until this one is finished, it would hold up the fresco indefinitely."

"This Diamante of yours is not very clever, Filippo," suggested the *proposto.*

"But he is very conscientious and very economical, eminence," replied Fra Filippo loyally. Then the need of some explanation of the rating which he had just given dawned on him. "However, he must learn to carry out the spirit of my work, else how can I leave him so that I may carry out other commissions and earn my livelihood?"

"Bah! What with panels and frescoes we have paid you eight hundred florins already, that is two hundred florins a year.* Surely that satisfies you, greedy one."

"But one has to pay assistants and journeymen and prentices, eminence. That runs away with most of the money."

"You have one assistant to whom you pay less than ten florins a year, one inferior journeyman who costs you less, and one prentice who costs you nothing—say twenty florins in wages—I know this because we advanced you your first year's wages.

*A golden florin equals about £6 or $30 present purchasing value. Fra Filippo must have been receiving for his *pieve* work about $6,000 a year, besides what he received for his private commissions, which works out at from $2,000 to $3,000 a panel.

That leaves you with one hundred and eighty florins a year for your personal expenses." 180 florins equals 5,400 dollars.

"I have to feed Diamante," remarked Fra Filippo.

The *proposto* laughed, gripping the friar's arm tightly, for he was very fond of him. "I have no right to interfere with your private life, Filippo," he said; "but don't let Fra Diamante spoil this last fresco of the Baptist."

"I shall paint the gown of Salome and the face of Herodias myself, eminence," promised Fra Filippo.

Then Messer Geminiano Inghirami left the friar, and returned up the *pieve* steps to have another look at the fresco before the light should fade.

IV

When the *proposto* had left him, Fra Filippo became conscious that he was feeling very tired. Early that morning he had said Mass at the Convent of Santa Margherita, of which convent he had been appointed chaplain; next, as soon as he had drunk a mouthful of wine and munched a crust of bread, he had hurried off to the church so that he might lay the foundation color of King Herod whilst the plaster was still very moist, and the stretching up to the face of Herod had strained the injury which he had received five years ago. An important interview with the Abbess of Santa Margherita about a proposed picture for the convent chapel had followed, and the rest of the day, be-

ginning with an unsatisfactory dinner and ending with the dispute between himself and Fra Diamante, had proved most wearisome.

Besides this, when a painter or a poet or an artist of any description is hot foot on his subject, he works himself relentlessly, and this fresco of Saint John Baptist was coming very right. When he had been a youth in the most receptive state of his training, he had watched the great Masaccio working at the magnificent frescoes in his own Carmelite Church, and now he had a chance to rival Masaccio on the walls of the *pieve*. The thought haunted him day and night, making him paint more desperately in his dreams than even when he was awake and working. This was all very wearying, and the dispute with Fra Diamante, who, in the present state of his nerves, seemed to be hindering him at every turn, was the climax.

To-morrow morning, when the world looked brighter, he would be able to laugh at Diamante's bunchy drapery and ridicule his schemes to scamp work; but this evening he could stand no more of the younger friar's company and he decided to seek his supper in more congenial surroundings. He would sup at the Inn of the Girdle, where the food was excellent, and where he could have either peace or company as his soul moved him.

So he took his way across the Pieve Square towards the inn of his choice.

CHAPTER II

AT THE INN OF THE GIRDLE

I

THE Inn of the Girdle, named after our Lady's Girdle—which precious relic had been discovered in Palestine and brought home by a pious native of Prato and was now one of the most treasured possessions of the *pieve*—was a comfortable inn that was frequented by the better-class citizens, the country gentry and the most important travelers on their way to Florence or Pistoja.

As Fra Filippo entered the dining-room of this inn, shutting the door after him and sniffing at the comfortable warmth and the smell of appetizing cooking, one called him from the right and another called him from the left and another, who was seated near the far end of the room, called him loudly; but, with a nod and a smile, he passed on to a distant corner where he could be alone. For, now that he had left off work, he was feeling very tired and very hungry. Also he had a very great thought which he wished to think over quietly whilst he was enjoying his supper.

This was a very respectable house where a good girl might serve without impropriety, and a neatly gowned serving-maid came forward to take his order. "What will you order, padre?" she asked, smiling.

Fra Filippo's great idea was coming upon him in huge waves, filling his whole mind. "The dish of the day, I suppose," he answered carelessly.

"But, padre!" And the girl raised her eyebrows and tilted her chin and shrugged her shoulders, all with great eloquence. It was as much as to say that, although the dish of the house might be good enough for the general public, it was quite unsuited to him.

Such eloquence of gesture could scarcely be disregarded, certainly not by a man of Fra Filippo's sympathetic temperament. "Then what do you suggest, Maddalena?" he asked, smiling.

Leaning forward with her soul in her eyes, the girl sank her voice to a tone of reverence as though such mysteries should be kept private. "There is a larded capon which is now browning before the fire," she whispered. "Heaven! That, with some truffles and a slice of smoked ham from Castiglione, would make a dish fit for his Holiness." And she drew herself straight upright, awaiting his decision.

He nodded, catching the spirit of her intense earnestness. "Good. That is ordered. And then, Maddalena?"

"A salad, of course," said she, striving to gain time so that she might think out what should follow. "A fresh salad will accompany the capon like music accompanies Vespers."

"And then, Maddalena?" he asked, watching her with interest, for he often supped at the Inn of the Girdle, and he had amused himself by training Maddalena in the artistic composition of a bill of fare.

"A larded capon, served as we have decided," she mused, "is rich and savory. It should be fol-

lowed by something that cleanses the palate. Ah! I have it, Fra Filippo. A dish of sliced oranges, sweetened with honey and dressed with the aqua-vitæ of the Gesuati."

"Excellent! And next?"

"You will drink Chianti with the capon and need nought with the oranges. You will now have a little of the cheese of Parma and a flask of the old Falernian which the patron cherishes for his especial guests. Of a truth, that is a supper fit for the great painter from Florence."

"You said, 'Fit for his Holiness,' little one."

She gave him a daring glance. "Body of Bacchus!" she cried. "If it is fit for Fra Filippo, it is fit for his Holiness. That is known to all Prato —very well known indeed."

"Eh, well," he sighed. "So Circe tempted the swine into gluttony. You have an excellent taste, Madonna Circe, and this supper will do you infinite credit."

So the serving-girl, delighted with herself, hurried off to make certain that the supper was prepared according to her directions, whilst Fra Filippo leant back in his chair playing with his great idea. He poured out a little Chianti from the flask which the maid had already brought, and his thoughts swung back over what had happened that very morning.

II

Early in that year, 1456, Fra Filippo had been appointed chaplain of the Convent of Santa Margherita in the Piazza del Mercatale and almost opposite his house. This convent was the home of a

small community of Augustinian nuns, and the building was so restricted in accommodation that the community was forced to limit its number to eight professed nuns besides a few novices.

Why the Abbess Bartolommea de' Bovacchiesi had appointed Fra Filippo as chaplain heaven only knows, for he had but little knowledge of theology and only enough Latin to enable him to say Mass; but we may assume that she was moved by the same idea that moves nearly all nuns—that only a religious can understand the spiritual needs of a religious. Besides, if one thinks the matter over, here was a Carmelite who was earning his income by his brush, and he could afford to act as chaplain at a very small remuneration. Possibly, also, the abbess was not impervious to the friar's charm of manner and kindly disposition. The appointment had been made a month ago, and to-day the abbess had become inspired with a great idea that formed the base of Fra Filippo's still greater idea.

Now the Abbess Bartolommea de' Bovacchiesi belonged to one of the oldest families of Prato and had ordered her convent wisely and well for many years; and, as Vasari tells us, "being desirous of leaving a remembrance of her pious rule," she had conceived the plan of having a panel of our Lady of the Girdle, painted by the first artist in Tuscany, which should form an altarpiece for the convent chapel.

Would Fra Filippo undertake the commission? The friar had shaken his head, for he had already as much paying work in hand as he could accomplish and was unwilling to undertake any more. The

abbess had pleaded. The friar had repeated his refusal. Again the abbess had pleaded.

Then, in his turn, the friar had conceived an idea that was positively stupendous. "If you will allow Sister Lucrezia to pose as a model for the Madonna, abbess," he had said, "I will undertake the altar-piece."

The abbess had gasped. "A nun to pose as a model, Fra Filippo? That is quite impossible!"

"If a Carmelite friar can paint a picture, abbess, an Augustinian nun can pose as the model."

And that had made her think.

Then the friar, pressing home his advantage, had laid bare a portion of his soul. "A painter must needs employ a model," he had urged, "for it is impossible to paint in the new manner without a model. Even the holy Fra Angelico, who was nearer a saint than any whom I have ever met, employed a model. But, mark, a professional model is not always a girl of the highest character, and when one is trying to paint the most holy Madonna—!"

"Ah!" the abbess had murmured. "I understand your difficulty."

"Imagine always employing the same model, abbess. A model for the daughter of Herodias, the same girl as the model for the Woman Taken in Adultery, the same girl as the model for our Lady." Here he drew on his artistic imagination. "And this same girl does not say her prayers, and she has the soul of a cabbage, which does not think, and she has the person of a wanton who does not wash, and her atmosphere fills the *bottega* with the reek of garlic!"

The abbess had shuddered, for she was a dainty old lady.

Then the friar had unfolded another of the wrappers which hid his soul from the world. He had always yearned to paint a picture that should be higher and nobler than anything which he had so far achieved, but he had been caught and chained to earth by the earthly character of his model. If he could paint Sister Lucrezia, leaving her to her thoughts and meditations whilst he raised his own mind to the Madonna of the Girdle!

"Besides," he had owned, "I have already painted Sister Lucrezia as the Madonna."

"Impossible!" had cried the abbess. "You have never had the opportunity."

Then Fra Filippo had smiled and plunged into his story. It had happened more than three years before the present date, soon after Fra Filippo had come to Prato and when Sister Lucrezia was staying at the convent of Santa Margherita with the view of becoming a nun. Fra Filippo had received a commission for a picture of our Lady from Messer Leonardo Bartolini of Florence—it is the round picture, or *tondo,* which now hangs in the Pitti Gallery—and, what with moving over to Prato and the difficulty of commencing the *pieve* frescoes, his invention had become as dead as the fields in winter, and he had tried and tried but without success. Then, on the feast of Santa Margherita, he had visited the convent, and when he had first seen Sister Lucrezia, dressed in her worldly clothes and holding the baby of one of the guests upon her lap, it had dawned on him that this maiden had the very face of the Madonna for which he was seeking.

"So, abbess," he had concluded, "I made a great to-do about the beauty of the child and, as I drew the child to please the mother, I drew Sister Lucrezia holding the child for my picture; and, going home, I painted her as the Madonna and this has been the best picture that I have ever painted. Believe me, abbess, Sister Lucrezia has the face and expression of our most gracious Lady."

"And you think that, if I permit Sister Lucrezia to pose as the model for the Madonna, your picture will be a success?"

"Without doubt, abbess," Fra Filippo had replied.

Then the abbess had promised to think the matter over and let him know her decision on the morrow, and, as she was a very wise and kindly old lady, he now hoped for the best.

III

Maddalena, her face alight with achievement, brought the capon and, setting it down on the table, hurried back for the salad. And Fra Filippo, who by now was simply ravenous, began to carve.

"Maddalena," he remarked, helping himself to salad, "you are one of this world's saintly women. To feed the hungry is a veritable work of mercy."

"Eh, padre," she answered, filling his glass with Chianti; "and to give drink to the thirsty is another. I am full of good works this evening." And she hurried off to attend to other of the guests, leaving Fra Filippo free to give way to his musing.

So far, he had only once succeeded in satisfying himself in his religious pictures. It is true that,

long ago in his youth, his paintings had been the expression of sacred themes by an obviously religious man; but, as skill and power had come to him, he had lost that deeply religious feeling which is the vital essence of all true religious art and, when he came to attempt a spiritual theme, he had nothing spiritual to express. He knew that his drawing was now almost perfect, that his coloring was both rich and delicate, and that the execution of his work could not be surpassed; but, when he came to the spiritual expression of his subject, he was bitterly conscious of his failure. His Madonnas were beautiful and refined ladies, nothing more; his saints were also refined and lovely, for he was naturally incapable of anything except refinement, but they were no more saints than he and Fra Diamante were saints.

Then, at length, he had painted that *tondo* for Messer Bartolini and, at one step, he had reached something that he had never before attained. For that picture of the Madonna, with incidents from her life in the background, had been the representation of a maiden full of grace and spirituality, and, what was more, for the first time in the history of art, he had made our Lady the living mother of a living bambino. If he could only go on with the same model, making sketches of her whilst he was painting the Santa Margherita altarpiece, he would paint as none had ever painted before.

Then, without a pause, his thoughts passed from the abstract to the concrete.

With her lovely and spiritual face and her intelligent mind, what a charming young nun Sister Lucrezia was. Most of the other nuns of Santa

Margherita were good and very ordinary women; but this one had all the refinement of the girl who had been brought up in Florence combined with the spiritual expression which marks the religious.

A wandering minstrel at a neighboring table began to sing a Tuscan song, but the tune and words did not penetrate the friar's consciousness and his thoughts flowed on unchecked.

Lucrezia de' Buti was, as Vasari tells us, an "exceedingly beautiful and graceful" maiden, and, since Fra Filippo's tastes lay in the direction of graceful beauty, he ought to have been on his guard. But, as yet, he was unconscious of the danger and so he let his thoughts wander on, picturing Lucrezia as she moved, as she held herself, and dwelling on the delightful blend of the human and the spiritual which showed itself in her face.

This musing might have lasted for ten minutes or, as far as he knew, it might have lasted for hours. There is no measure of day-dreams. Then Maddalena aroused Fra Filippo.

IV

Maddalena, the serving-girl, removed the capon and placed a dish of sliced oranges upon the table. This was truly a seductive dish: oranges, peeled and sliced against the grain, sweetened with honey and stimulated with the strong waters that the Gesuati of Sienna had distilled; and Fra Filippo came to earth with a start. After all, the body demands attention as well as the mind. Then, as he sniffed the scent of the oranges, he became conscious

that the minstrel at the neighboring table was singing something above the ordinary.

The man had that rare gift, a sympathetic voice; and, as he touched his lute, he named the title of his theme:

TO MY MOST GRACIOUS LADY

and sang in *terza rima*

"Lady, I love you! love you, dear, so much
That Love is burning with a white-hot flame,
Searing mere passion into lifeless dust.
First, when I met you, e'er this true Love came,
Your presence thrilled me, heart and every nerve;
Yet, even then, my Love deserved its name,
For, when I met you, there was this reserve
That, though you thrilled me to my inmost core,
I only thrilled to worship and to serve.

"Now, Lady mine, hath Love scorched up the straw,
Leaving the flame, yet searing all that's base:
Wonderous Love, its flames grow more and more!
Yet, since no Love can burn without fresh grace—
E'en holy Love needs fuel, else it dies—
So, dear, my Love draws ardor from your face.
For, in your face, and in your shining eyes,
Love seeks its virtue, till my Love is such
That it will burn for you all Angel-wise."

The lute throbbed on, playing softly and speaking to the inmost soul of Fra Filippo. Then the last verse began:—

"I watch your lips; no thought of earthly touch;
I watch your lips, moved by your gracious soul,

Till Seraphs doubt how man can love so much.
I watch those lips, seeing the smiles that stole
Upwards and outwards from the soul's delight,
And my poor heart, once earth-bound, now is whole.
I watch your eyes—Love, turn those eyes towards me!—
I watch those eyes, and, watching, I adore
Until my Love shall flame eternally."

With his eyes shining and his breath coming quickly, Fra Filippo beckoned the minstrel over to his table.

"Bring a fresh glass and fresh plates, Maddalena," he called, "for this gentleman is my guest."

The serving-girl brought two clean plates and two clean glasses, and she placed the cheese on the table and proceeded to open a flask of golden wine. Then she went off smiling; for not only was she a kind-hearted girl, who was thoroughly pleased to know that her customer was enjoying himself, but she was also a thrifty girl, who could see how the cat was jumping, and she foresaw that the friar would have to settle a heavy bill out of which she would get her small percentage.

"Messere," said the friar, turning to the minstrel, "who was the poet that wrote the verses of your song?"

The minstrel swallowed a mouthful of orange and fingered his wineglass. "I learnt them from my father, padre. He was also a minstrel."

"But who was the poet that wrote them?"

The minstrel smiled. "When my father had drunk a small flask of old Chianti, padre, he would say that they were written by Boccaccio."

"Yes?"

"And when he had drunk two small flasks of old

Chianti, he would say that they were written by Petrarch."

"Yes?"

"And when he had drunk three small flasks of old Chianti and had become generous, he would say that they were written by the divine Dante."

"And you say?"

The minstrel winked an eye and nodded his head wisely. "Messere," he said, "I have always thought that my father wrote these verses himself, for he was a true poet who did not leave me one *soldo* to rub against another."

"But that is scarcely to be believed," cried Fra Filippo. "No ordinary poet could write verses like those."

The minstrel shook his head. "Observe," he pointed out, "that my father was a true lover of *The Divine Comedy* and had mastered the science of writing in *terza rima*. Observe, also, that he had studied the philosophy of Dante very deeply."

Fra Filippo looked at the minstrel with wonder—just as one might look at the son of a genuine prophet.

"Well, as I say," continued the minstrel, "this poem was either written by Dante, or else it was written by my father in imitation of the divine poet; for no one else in all this wide country of Italy could have conceived an idea of love that was so ridiculous and, at the same time, so dangerous as this. Even Petrarch was more human."

The poem had appealed to Fra Filippo, convincing his reason on the one hand and touching his better nature on the other, and he longed to argue violently; but, before one starts an argument one

must be assured that the other understands the subject which forms the basis of the argument, and he asked a searching question. "May I ask, messere," he said, "whether you have ever experienced love?"

The minstrel fingered his glass, sipping a little wine, thoughtfully. "I may have met with a little love here, and a little love there—for who can escape the snares of Venus?—and, if I remember right, it always happens as Messer Dante (or, perchance, my father) describes it. One watches the maiden's lovely lips and gazes into her lovely eyes, and one vows that it is 'all Angel-wise'; then, what happens happens." He drank more wine and his face clouded. "Once, padre, I loved a maiden truly, and we were married, and we were happy together for a year; but, since then, she has borne me thirteen children. When the first bambino comes down the chimney, love flies out of the door." And he sighed bitterly.

As the minstrel's face grew gloomy, Fra Filippo's face brightened; for he saw that his intuition was right, and that this man was but an earth-bound soul who had neither inherited the paternal fire nor the paternal understanding of the mystery of love.

"Will you write me out a copy of that poem, messere?" he asked.

"With the greatest pleasure, padre," answered the man, grateful for the hospitality which he had received. "I will leave it with the serving-wench to-morrow."

Then, as the guests were beginning to leave the room, the minstrel drank down his wine and went round to collect his largess.

V

Left to himself, the friar leant back in his seat, sipping his wine and thinking deeply.

Fra Filippo knew all about love, at least in theory; for had he not spent his early manhood in the Casa Medici, a friend of Cosimo de' Medici and a companion of the philosophers and poets who made Florence illustrious? And these men were full of that Quattrocento Philosophy of Love which was such a strange blend of the doctrine of Plato and the poetry of Dante.

There were, so Marsilio Ficino, the young Platonist, held, two kinds of love: there was the divine type of love, which sprang from God and which embodied a striving after the highest ideals of spiritual happiness—of this type the minstrel had evidently known nothing; there was the earthly type of love, which sprang from Jove and which the minstrel had experienced.

The divine love was implanted in the soul by God when He made man, and the man who had the gift of holy love would seek the likeness of God in the person whom he loved. There was no sensuality or passion in this type of love, only the intense desire to see the beauty and perfections of God reflected in the beloved one. In short it was a love existing in the mind, which should make the love of a man and his Lady "all Angel-wise." This high ideal was not a fancy, for already it was beginning to bear fruits. A few years later, when the doctrine had reached maturity and the practise of Platonic Love had become common in Italy, no

breath of scandal ever sullied the names of those who were followers of this strange cult.

Earthly love, on the other hand, was a material passion that had come from the old gods, and its highest aim was to see the likeness of the parents perpetuated in the children. It did not seek for eternal life, merely for the procreation of life in the persons of the offspring; and, as in the case of the minstrel, it was marked by satiety and disillusionment.

So far, Fra Filippo had regarded Sister Lucrezia merely as the model for whom he had always longed; but now it dawned on him that she was far more than this. For was not the soul the form of the body which made the body what it was? And must not the soul of Lucrezia, which had made such a dainty body and which peeped out through such compelling eyes and which displayed itself in such a lovely and inspiring face, be the very perfection of a human soul? Since this was but the elementary philosophy of the age, a philosophy which was known to the meanest philosopher and to the most superficial poet, it came to Fra Filippo without seeking.

Then it came to him in a flash, just as when God had said "Let there be light" and there was light, that the love of Lucrezia de' Buti might be the magnet which should draw his mind away from the things of earth and fix it on the divine perfections which were reflected in the little nun.

It is said that the first effects of love, save in the debased and sensual, are to blind the eyes to pitfalls and to lift up the heart into day-dreams of idealism.

And so this dawning of a newly conceived love lifted the heart of Fra Filippo into the highest heaven where such angels as those that Fra Angelico had painted welcomed its coming.

On the morrow Fra Filippo had a long day before him in which his powers must be at their best, so he got up from his seat, paid his reckoning, and set off for home with his thoughts in the stars.

CHAPTER III

LUCREZIA DE' BUTI

I

SISTER LUCREZIA adjusted her black mantle, smoothed down her white serge habit, folded her hands, placed her feet together, and looked down with that custody of the eyes which is seemly in a young nun; then she glanced up quickly and again lowered her eyes.

"Here, Fra Filippo," said the abbess gravely, "is your model for the Madonna." And she seated herself on one of the three chairs which had been placed in readiness, so that Sister Lucrezia should sit on the middle chair, with the abbess on her left and the prioress on her right; for it was seemly that the mother prioress, as second in command and maintainer of discipline in the community, should take charge of so young a nun as Sister Lucrezia during the sitting.

"I trust," remarked the prioress, always ready to improve her charges, "that Sister Lucrezia will appreciate the duty which is imposed on her; for it is a great and very precious privilege to be allowed to pose as a model for the Madonna. She must endeavor to keep her thoughts recollected and her mind in the presence of our most gracious Lady." She glanced at the chaplain so that he might confirm her directions. "Perhaps it would be wise if

Sister Lucrezia were to say her rosary whilst you paint her, Fra Filippo."

Fra Filippo chuckled. "Am I to paint her with her lips murmuring Paters and Aves all the time?" he asked. "Truly if I succeed in painting her aright, men will name this picture: 'The Whispering Madonna.'"

The prioress frowned and pursed her lips, for she was a very fussy and managing lady who did not like to have her suggestions questioned.

"But Sister Lucrezia cannot remain inactive, padre," said she. "Idle hands and idle thoughts invite the devil to provide a task." And dipping into her work-bag, she brought out three small and half-finished pincushions upon which designs had been lightly drawn.

"Here," she said, "are some pincushions which are to be embroidered with scenes from the life of our Lady. Sister Lucrezia can work at these whilst you paint."

The friar threw up his hands as though in despair. "And men will call this picture: 'Our Lady of the Pincushion!'"—He heard Sister Lucrezia give a delighted, and only half-suppressed giggle.—"As a matter of fact," he explained, "the abbess wishes me to paint a picture of our Lady giving the Girdle to Saint Thomas, and Sister Lucrezia must be looking at Saint Thomas whilst she is bestowing the Girdle. To have the Madonna embroidering a pincushion —a pincushion, forsooth!—whilst she is giving the Girdle to the Apostle, is ridiculous."

The abbess, thinking that it was time for her to put in a word, looked at mother prioress. "Dear mother," she said, "I would have you remember

that Fra Filippo is posing the model and painting the picture, not you."

And the prioress closed her lips tightly and kept silence; for she was a good, if very trying, woman, whose life was a long struggle against a naturally interfering and masterful disposition tempered by an honest desire to keep her vow of holy obedience.

Then the abbess, whose failing health had begun to blunt her power of judgment and who, considering her position, was inclined to spend far too much of her time in heaven, and to delegate too much responsibility to her subordinate, retired to the convent chapel to pray, and Fra Filippo, Sister Lucrezia and the prioress were left to themselves.

II

Fra Filippo commenced his preparations. First he dragged a large table to one corner of the room, arranging it so that the light from the window would shine from the left; then he placed a chair upon the table; then he helped Sister Lucrezia to mount her makeshift throne. Finally he knelt down a few feet from the table and slightly to the left, holding up his hands as though to receive the Girdle from the Madonna.

"I am Saint Thomas," he explained, "holding out my hands for our Lady's gift. I have been a very unbelieving Apostle, and our gracious Lady has appeared to me so that she may give me her girdle to strengthen my faith in her Assumption." And he placed a chair to mark the place of Didymus, throwing his large white cloak over the back of it.

"This," said he, producing a piece of knotted

cord, "represents the Holy Girdle which you are giving to Saint Thomas—of course, when I come to paint the Girdle, I shall paint it from the relic in the *pieve*—and I want you to hold it out like this." And he arranged her hands as they are posed in the Madonna della Cintola which is now hanging in the Pallazo del Comune at Prato.

Then he brought up his easel, placed on it a drawing-board upon which had been stretched a large sheet of Lucca paper, and, fetching his sticks of charcoal, made ready to start work.

In the meantime the mother prioress too had been busy; for she had brought her chair close to the table so that she might keep her eyes on both the friar and Sister Lucrezia; she had opened her work-bag and had produced some embroidery, and had started to relate, for the hundredth time, the Legend of the Girdle together with the miraculous virtues of the aforesaid Girdle and its effects on the faith of those who venerate it.

The friar began to draw.

"Cast down your eyes, sister," bade the prioress. "The custody of the eyes is the most precious possession of a young nun." The eyes were cast down.

"What are you doing to Sister Lucrezia, reverend mother?" cried Fra Filippo, ablaze. "Heaven, woman! I tell her to look at Saint Thomas, and you tell her to look at her toes, and what in the name of ten thousand fiends is the poor girl to do?" He strode over to the dummy Saint Thomas and thumped the mantle which he had placed on the back of the chair. "See! This is Saint Thomas!" he cried. He strode over to the abbess's chair, picked up her cushion and planked it down on the

summit of the mantle. "And this is the face of Saint Thomas upon which you must fix your gaze."

Then he turned to Lucrezia, and his voice became persuasive. "Most gracious Madonna," he pleaded, "this is your poor Apostle who is suffering from temptations of his spirit and needs your help. Turn your eyes on him, I pray, and perform the wondrous miracle that shall confirm his faith!" And he stepped back to watch the effect of his exhortation upon Sister Lucrezia.

For the most extraordinary thing about Fra Filippo's art is the way in which he identifies his model with the saint for whom the model has posed. If he can induce the model to throw herself into the spirit of our Lady, or of Santa Margherita, or of Santa Theopista, it seems to have inspired his imagination and he can achieve a devotional picture; if he fails to persuade his model to throw herself into the spirit of the subject, he can merely paint a charming picture of a pretty girl pretending to be a saint.

But Lucrezia de' Buti was gifted with a strong imagination blended with the true histrionic instinct, and gradually her face took on a rapt expression and she gazed with her soul in her eyes at the imagined figure of the poor, doubting Apostle.

Fra Filippo, drawing a deep breath, seized his charcoal.

III

Now, as soon as the prioress had regained her temper after Fra Filippo's rough rebuke—for, although she was the victim of a managing temperament and an utter absence of tact, she was a woman

who tried to do her duty with her whole heart—she cast about in her mind how she might meet the situation. Here was this rude and imperious friar, who had just invoked ten thousand demons and who was no fit person to companion a young religious; and here was Sister Lucrezia, who had yielded herself to his spell and was sitting as though she had been bewitched. Great evils need desperate remedies; so, with a prayer for guidance, she commenced to talk of holy things.

Had Fra Filippo known the holy Dominican, Fra Angelico, who was said to have mixed his pigments with prayers? Yes, Fra Filippo had known Fra Angelico very well. He could not say that the Dominicans were the friends of the Carmelites in the same way that the Camaldolese were; but he had known Fra Angelico very well indeed, and he could assure mother prioress that the report of Fra Angelico having mixed his pigments with prayers had been entirely erroneous, for Fra Angelico had mixed his paint with albumen and fig-tree sap like any other artist. Of course Fra Angelico had been a very holy man, but that was not the cause of his fine painting; for some very holy men, like the Bishop of Fiesole, could not paint at all.

Resolutely ignoring his flippancy, the prioress asked Fra Filippo if he knew the Archbishop of Florence. This was an error on her part; for, although the friar was very friendly with the pious Bishop of Fiesole and the *Proposto* of Prato, he had just cause to detest the Archbishop of Florence and all his works, and his remarks on the ecclesiastical authorities of his native city were more pointed than complimentary.

What did Fra Filippo think of the spiritual state of Florence? Alas! Fra Filippo knew little of the spiritual state of Florence, and cared less, so his answers were short and elusive. If, as he explained, he had listened to all the gossip of the sacristies, he would have had no time to paint.

And so on, and so on. By the time that the mother prioress had questioned him and cross-questioned him for forty minutes, his temper was frayed to rags and his impulse to draw had vanished into thin air, and, what was worse, his model had caught his restlessness and was now looking at him, now at the prioress, and only occasionally remembering to let her eyes rest on the absurd cushion which posed for the head of Saint Thomas.

"Well," said Fra Filippo, stretching himself, "that will do for this morning, for I can draw no more." And he helped Sister Lucrezia down from her throne. "May I speak to the abbess before I leave, reverend mother?"

"Certainly, padre," answered the prioress and, well pleased with her morning's diplomacy, she hurried off to fetch the abbess. In fact, she was so pleased with the way in which she had kept the talk on serious subjects that she forgot to take Sister Lucrezia with her.

IV

When the door closed after the prioress, Sister Lucrezia stood as she had been taught, her eyes cast down, her hands folded before her, and her tongue silent until the chaplain should see fit to address her; but, although she was calm outwardly, her heart was seething with anger.

Fra Filippo took one turn up and down the room and seated himself on the edge of the table. "I never remember spending such an infernal morning," he grumbled.

Lucrezia curbed her anger and waited for him to say more.

"That fiend of a woman talked and talked until I was nearly crazy. A perfect light and a perfect model, and a whole morning wasted!"

Lucrezia could stand this no longer. "Fra Filippo," she said, her voice trembling, "I'm so sorry, more sorry than words can tell."

This came like balm to the friar's fretted spirit. "It was not your fault, sister. You didn't chatter."

"Of course not!" she cried. "If I could have smothered—" And she bit off the rebellious words.

"As I say," he repeated, "you didn't chatter. You sat like an angel until she made you fidget."

Lucrezia was horrified. "Did I fidget?" she asked.

"Not at first," he answered, smiling. "At first you were the best model I have ever had. Then, when she got on the tiles and began to caterwaul, you became as restless as a little sparrow. I suppose she irritated you as she irritated me."

The girl shook her head vehemently. "No!" she said. "It was not that. You see, Fra Filippo, I was brought up in Florence, and my father used to have many painters and poets and philosophers at his house, and I have been taught that no artist can work whilst a woman babbles, and I was in agony for you."

Fra Filippo was delighted. Here was this girl behaving, not like a provincial of Prato, but like a

Florentine whose mind was endowed with the gift of understanding and who was the fitting companion for a painter, a poet, or a philosopher.

"I have a plan," he hinted, "whereby I may be able to circumvent mother prioress."

"What is your plan?" she asked, her eyes sparkling.

"If I succeed, you will know my plan," he answered.

"Unless you satisfy my curiosity," cried Lucrezia, "I shall die of waiting."

But the friar was obdurate; for he knew full well that, although a secret long withheld defeats its own end, a little waiting whets the curiosity. "You must find the prioress very trying in the community," he suggested.

"Holy Saints," she cried, "that is true! She talks and talks, always about holy things, suggesting, exhorting, admonishing, until Spinetta and I feel that we shall grow demented. Spinetta is my sister," she explained. "May I see what you have drawn?"

But footsteps approached, and, as they approached, the couple drew apart. And the light went out of Lucrezia's eyes until they became entirely without expression.

CHAPTER IV

FRA FILIPPO PERSUADES

I

THE prioress and Sister Lucrezia had departed, and the abbess and Fra Filippo were left alone. The abbess hesitated, blushing prettily as some old ladies will, and then plunged.

"Fra Filippo," she began, "I suppose it is too early to ask after the success of the painting; but, if you will forgive the impatience of an old woman, is there any promise of success?" And she looked at him in a pathetic way, for the success of the altarpiece had come very near her heart. "You see," she explained, *"ars longa, vita brevis*, and my life is growing very feeble."

"As you say," he answered, helping himself to the wine which the abbess had ordered to be placed for his refection, "art is a slow process, and I have not yet commenced the picture." Then he seated himself close to the lady abbess and drew on his artistic imagination.

"Saint Thomas of Aquin tells us," he remarked, "that, if a woman comes down—er—enters the door, art flies out of the window." This amazing statement he had adapted from the minstrel's proverb about the arrival of the first bambino, and he had nearly said, "if a woman comes down the chim-

ney," etc., but had managed to check himself just in time.

"Which saying, Fra Filippo," laughed the abbess, "is probably more truthful than complimentary."

"Of course," amended the friar, speaking with intention, "the Angelic Doctor did not mean a prudent woman, for a prudent woman knows when to keep silent, but one who talks."

"Mother prioress, for example," suggested the abbess, taking his point.

"Exactly!" And they both laughed.

There was a knock at the door, and the cellaress —she is the nun who looks after the food rather than after the wine—entered bearing a tray.

"I have brought you some cakes and also some of our biscuits, Fra Filippo," said she with an air of satisfaction. For Prato prides itself on its biscuits, and those of the Convent of Santa Margherita were particularly famous. "You will need them after your exertion."

"That is true," answered Fra Filippo, helping himself; "too much of the pious conversation of an experienced nun is very tiring to frail humanity." And the sister cellaress left the room, biting her lips to keep back the laughter.

"You should not have said that, Fra Filippo," chided the abbess. "I look to you to support mother prioress's authority, not to lower her in the eyes of the sisters."

Having laid the ground for his complaint with considerable skill, the friar became very serious.

"When you hear what I have gone through this morning, mother abbess, you will pity rather than blame." And he cleared his throat. "I had posed

Sister Lucrezia, and I had given her something which might represent a girdle to hold, and I had persuaded her to look down very pitifully at poor Saint Thomas who was kneeling before her, and I had begun to draw her face, when mother prioress interfered, ordering her to cast down her eyes, and the pose was spoilt."

The abbess nodded her head in understanding.

"Very well, I had put that right, and Sister Lucrezia was again looking pitifully at Saint Thomas, when mother prioress started to talk. Heaven, how she talked! Did Fra Angelico mix his pigments with prayers?—I think that the spirit of poor Fra Angelico must weep when people ask that absurd question!—Did I know the holy Archbishop of Florence? Was there true piety in Florence? Did I believe that the ravens of Elias founded the Order of Mount Carmel? These and a thousand more foolish questions she asked, until I was distracted."

"I suppose a painter must work in silence and without distractions," suggested the abbess.

"At any rate he must work without another chattering to him, and worrying him, and taking away his thoughts from what he is doing. But that," he continued, "was not the worst of mother prioress's indiscretion. Consider, dear abbess, the effect that all this chatter and my growing irritation had on my model!" And he went over to fetch the sketches which he had made.

Covering the remaining sketches with his hand, he displayed the first drawing to the abbess. This drawing showed the beginning of a very beautiful face, marked by that look of pity of which he had spoken, and altogether Madonna-like. Then he un-

covered the rest of the drawings, and the abbess could see the delightful expression vanishing and a harassed expression taking its place.

"I comprehend fully," she murmured. And, looking him straight in the face, she asked what remedy he could suggest.

"That I should be left alone with my model whilst I am painting."

The abbess grew disturbed. "But, surely," she began, and hesitated. "Is that quite as it should be?" she asked.

Fra Filippo knit his brows. "When I am posing her," he suggested, "I think that some one ought to be present—yourself, for instance—not mother prioress. But, when I have started painting, Sister Lucrezia might be a waxen image or the cat in the street as far as I am concerned, for I am painting our Lady of the Girdle." As far as he was concerned—that is to say, as far as he knew himself—Fra Filippo was perfectly honest in his statement; but, unfortunately, no artist ever realizes the pitfalls of his own artistic temperament.

So finally, after much discussion, it was arranged that the abbess should be present whilst Fra Filippo was posing his model, and that Fra Filippo and Sister Lucrezia should then be left to themselves.

"I do not know what mother prioress and the other senior nuns will say to my arrangement," sighed the abbess. "My one excuse is that you are no longer very young."

II

Fra Filippo helped himself to a second glass of wine and pulled himself together, for he felt that

he had a duty to perform which required much tact.

"Let me understand the position of the mother prioress, so that I make no mistake," began Fra Filippo. "In my own community, where the prior is head of the community, he is appointed for life by the Carmelite authorities; in other communities, where an abbot is head of the community, the prior is appointed as the abbot's assistant every three years; in your community, which consists of an abbess and seven nuns, the prioress is appointed by yourself. Am I right?"

"You are quite right, padre," replied the abbess.

"Then, if you can appoint the prioress, you can also dismiss her and appoint another prioress in her place?"

The abbess frowned. "Of course I could do so; but, except at the time of the three-yearly appointments, when I appoint the prioress, the novice-mistress, the cellaress, and so on, the proceeding would be most unusual. Why do you ask this question, Fra Filippo?"

"Have patience, mother abbess, whilst I ask one more question." Now that he had come to the point he was feeling a little nervous, for, although the Abbess Bartolommea de' Bovacchiesi was a very sweet old lady, she was not one with whom he could take a liberty. "Do you think that mother prioress is the right woman for her post?"

"Because she interfered with your model, Fra Filippo?"

"No, believe me, dear mother, I am speaking as your chaplain and not as a painter, and, honestly,

I wish to know if you consider that mother prioress is suitable."

The abbess hesitated, knowing full well that, as a prioress, mother prioress left much to be desired. "She is truly pious," she temporized, "with a strong sense of duty."

"By Bacchus!" cried the friar. "I have reason to know that! But does she make a good prioress?"

The abbess sighed. "We are but a small community, Fra Filippo, and five of us are young and inexperienced. Who else could I appoint as prioress?"

"Mother Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi, your sister," he suggested. "She is very holy and also very gentle."

"But Mother Jacopa is already novice-mistress."

"With only one novice to look after!"

"That does not matter. Whether there be one or twenty novices the responsibility is just the same. One cannot have the same nun as novice-mistress and prioress, for the confusion would be indescribable. It is true that I might appoint Mother Jacopa as prioress, and make the present prioress novice-mistress; but, if I did so, what would happen to our little novice?" And that question made the friar shudder.

"Of a truth, she would be driven mad!" he cried.

Again the abbess sighed, this time deeply. "Fra Filippo," she said, "I am an old woman and getting past my work. Also I suffer from an ailment which my physician calls angina pectoris, and which leaves me very feeble. When I am unable to attend to the community, I feel that I have a prioress in whose virtue and devotion I can rely."

Fra Filippo was deeply touched; yet he felt that he must make one more effort. "There is Sister Piera di Vanni Sensi, abbess. She seems prudent and the others like her."

"But she is young, with the new method of thought."

Fra Filippo smiled. "That is a fault which time will mend. Even we ourselves were once young."

"With the thoughts that were proper to youth, and with the respect that was due to age and experience. I will tell you the truth, Fra Filippo. We elder nuns are living in difficult times, and we scarce know how to meet them. The world has changed since we were young, and we cannot tell what it portends. Those who come to us as novices, especially those who come to us from Florence, are entirely different from what we were. They appear to have been allowed to mix with gentlemen, and to read the works of the philosophers, the poets and even of the story-tellers as they thought fit. They appear to have been allowed to discourse on subjects such as we should have considered unseemly, to question an order that we should have obeyed blindly as an act of obedience, and we do not altogether trust them."

The poor lady abbess was merely face to face with the problem that meets the older people of each succeeding generation; but Fra Filippo took it as a personal matter. "You are speaking of Sister Lucrezia, abbess?"

"I am speaking of Sister Lucrezia and of Sister Spinetta de' Buti. The rest, Sister Piera di Vanni Sensi for example, are less intelligent and less highly educated."

"Have you any serious fault to find with these?"

"Only that their heads are filled with poetry and such like frivolity, and that they are impatient of the old discipline which should rule all young maidens." The abbess paused, realizing that she might have been blaming unjustly. "Perhaps the poor maidens are to be pitied rather than censured," she explained; "for their uncle was Messer Francesco de' Buti, the Lecturer on Dante at the famous Academy of Pisa."'

"Indeed!" exclaimed the friar, greatly interested. Francesco de' Buti had been a very celebrated man in his day, and his *Commentaries* on Dante were still freely quoted in the Medici circle. "But the writings of Dante are merely the philosophy of Saint Thomas of Aquin turned into verse. At least, so I am told."

"Is that so?" asked the abbess, much relieved.

"So I am told. Myself, I am a painter, not a philosopher."

Then Fra Filippo, conscious that he had not yet succeeded in displacing the mother prioress from her post, made his supreme effort.

"Concerning the prioress, mother abbess," he urged. "Have you considered how such ceaseless talk about the lesser matters of piety, how such endless girding against little matters of behavior, and how such incessant interference about tiny questions of discipline must irritate the sisters, especially those who are young, making them discontented and rebellious."

"Have you heard any whispers of discontent and rebellion amongst the nuns, Fra Filippo?" asked the abbess shrewdly.

He could not tell of the complaint which Sister Lucrezia had made; much less could he tell of the confessions of rebellious thoughts which he had heard as chaplain. "I am judging from my knowledge of human nature," he said weakly. "Also I am judging by my own experience as a religious."

"And I, judging from my knowledge of this community," replied the abbess, "am content with mother prioress. At any rate she is the best nun available for the post." And from the tone of her voice Fra Filippo knew that the subject was closed.

"Now, concerning the next sitting, Fra Filippo," said the abbess. "What time would suit you best?"

Sighing, the friar helped himself to a third glass of wine; for, although he had failed in his attempt to unseat mother prioress, he had succeeded in his attempt to banish her from the sittings of Sister Lucrezia, and he must rest content with such success as the gods had given him.

CHAPTER V

LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

I

AS he left the Convent of Santa Margherita, Fra Filippo was feeling triumphant; for, not only had he succeeded in getting his own way about Lucrezia, but also had he realized from his preliminary studies of her face that this was the very model for whom he had been seeking. He entered the *pieve,* found that Diamante's rendering of the drapery of Salome was progressing none so badly, added a few magic touches with a brush that seemed to have been dipped in gossamer mixed with light—"and that's far better than pigments mingled with prayer!" he murmured—and then, putting his arm through that of the younger Carmelite, he dragged him home to dinner.

"How do you manage to achieve in a moment what I have toiled at for hours, Filippo?" asked Fra Diamante, as they turned into the Piazza del Mercatale.

"Because I see exactly what's needed, pumpkin-head," replied Fra Filippo.

"Sometimes I wonder why you have so much patience with me, Filippo," sighed Diamante, who was feeling as full of gratitude as an egg is full of meat.

"Because I love you, old pumpkin-head," laughed

Fra Filippo, tucking his arm into that of the young friar still more affectionately.

It was a strange friendship that existed between these two, between the man who was the greatest genius of his age and the man who, at the age of twenty-six, showed no more promise of artistic talent than did a journeyman of a second-rate *bottega;* but there was no doubt that it existed, and we find Fra Filippo insisting that Diamante should have a share in all the more important of his undertakings.

They turned into their house where they found dinner awaiting them.

II

The room was bright; a fire of pine-logs blazed on the hearth; above the fireplace there was a charming little marble bas-relief of the Divine Infant and Saint John, carved by Donatello's pupil, Desiderio da Settignano; several strips of old embroidery hung against the wall; and a litter of half finished panels filled one corner. A table, laid with a fair linen cloth and set with glasses from Venice, stood in the middle of the room, all ready for dinner; and as soon as they had entered a woman appeared with the first course of their meal.

"Concerning this picture for Santa Margherita," remarked Fra Filippo, as he grated some cheese over his plate of savory spaghetti, "I have made arrangements with the abbess."

"Yes?" replied Fra Diamante, reaching over for the cheese and grater.

"I have persuaded the lady abbess to allow me to paint Sister Lucrezia as the Madonna."

Diamante sat fixed, his eyes wide open and the hands which grasped the cheese and grater motionless.

"And what is more," continued Fra Filippo, "I have persuaded the lady abbess to allow me to paint Sister Lucrezia alone, with none other present to distract us." And, sighing a great sigh of contentment, he filled his mouth full of the savory spaghetti.

"Is the abbess crazy?" cried Fra Diamante.

"So the mother prioress will think," chuckled Fra Filippo, his mouth full, and he went on to explain his morning's adventure and the disastrous effect of mother prioress's aggravating chatter both on himself and his model.

Fra Diamante grunted, not yet convinced of the propriety of the arrangement.

Then the Carmelite who, although so far he may have been blind to the interior vision of heavenly things, was certainly more inspired by the true artistic spirit than any artist who had preceded him, let himself go. And, whilst he was laying down the law of "religious art as influenced by environment," Fra Filippo's housekeeper changed the plates and set a dish of veal cutlets, cooked with calves' ears and truffles, upon the table.

"Thus you must see, Diamante," he went on, "that the painter is always chained to his model. Fra Angelico, for example, who always employed discreet and pious women as his female models, could never get away from these discreet and pious women. Do you remember the frescoes in the Priory of San Marco?"

"Naturally!" replied Fra Diamante, who had

been set to study the frescoes in the Dominican house as part of his artistic education.

"If you remember the frescoes in San Marco, you will remember the frescoes of the Annunciation and Nativity in which our Lady is painted as a very discreet and pious woman. I tell you that the Madonna was never a discreet and pious woman, especially at the time of the Nativity; for she was *plena gratia,* and her immaculate soul made her sinless body fairer, more gracious and more youthful than that of any other maiden."

"That is true," murmured Fra Diamante. "That is very good theology indeed."

"And so," purred the elder friar, "having secured a very lovely and holy young nun as my model, I am less chained to earth than was Fra Angelico, and I should be able to rise to greater heights."

In this argument Fra Filippo was manifestly unjust to Fra Angelico; for what saintly Dominican artist would introduce attractive models within his Priory or paint lovely female faces on the walls of the friars' passages and cells to prove a temptation to the younger brothers? When Fra Angelico painted Madonnas and Saints for secular churches, he could paint very lovely and attractive faces. But then, what true artist, who is ruled by his intuitions rather than by his reason, can be logical in his arguments and just in his criticisms?

"If this picture should prove to be the masterpiece that I anticipate," continued Fra Filippo, filling his glass from the huge flask of Chianti which stood in a silver swing upon the table—as such flasks do now—"if, I say, my Madonna should prove to be the Madonna whom all painters have

longed to paint and whom none has succeeded in painting, then the nuns cannot deny me the further use of my model."

"No," muttered Diamante, impressed.

"And, as Sister Lucrezia grows older and more full of the spirit of the true religious, I shall paint her as the Madonna of the Crucifixion."

"Yes," murmured Diamante.

"Some day," said Fra Filippo, speaking softly, "when she has advanced yet further in the spiritual life, I shall paint her as the Madonna of the Assumption."

And Fra Filippo leant back in a day-dream. Nothing leads a man, whether he be twenty or forty-nine, into the dangerous day-dreams of idealism so quickly as the process of falling in love with a dainty and virtuous maiden.

Presently he roused himself, looking at his assistant with a twinkle in his eye. "Get you gone, Diamante," he said, "for I have much to occupy me this afternoon."

III

As soon as Fra Diamante had left for the *pieve,* Fra Filippo took a long rule and a stick of charcoal, and he went into a storeroom where a number of panels of seasoned wood were propped up straight against the wall. These panels had been very carefully selected and the planks out of which they had been made were free from knots and thoroughly well seasoned: as a matter of fact, the friar was a most efficient craftsman and the panels which he had chosen are as sound to-day as they were nearly five centuries ago.

Finally, after rejecting on account of slight imperfections, several which were of suitable size, he found a panel that was a few inches longer than his measurements and worthy as a foundation for his great masterpiece, and he outlined the exact size for his journeyman. To-morrow the journeyman would cut it down to the required measurement and coat it with a surface of lime and glue, a surface that would be as fine as the finest eggshell and as lasting as the cement of the ancient Romans.

Then, having found his panel, he washed his hands carefully, for he was almost finicking about the cleanliness of his work and person, and returned to his living-room. His housekeeper had cleared away dinner, and the pine-logs were burning cheerfully on the hearth.

IV

Fra Filippo got out a sheet of the finest Lucca paper, stretched it on a drawing-board, got him an inkhorn and a bundle of swan-quill pens all finely pointed, sat himself down at the table so that the light came from the left, sucked one of the unused pens so that the ink should flow evenly, and commenced to draw.

"Fra Filippo drew exceedingly well," Vasari tells us, and here Vasari knew what he was writing about, for he goes on, "as may be seen in our book of drawings by the most famous painters, more particularly in certain specimens wherein the Santo Spirito altarpiece is delineated, with others which present drawings of the frescoes in the Duomo of Prato." Also we know from the few examples of his pen-and-ink work that are now extant that he

drew with an admirable ease and precision of touch, expressing actual form by the delicate unbroken strokes of his pen without the use of shading or cross-hatching in order to obtain relief. Now he was drawing as one inspired, for the mental image of his picture was clear before him and he had merely to put down on paper what was already in his mind.

Here, in the foreground, was Saint Thomas kneeling before the tomb of our Lady which, as tradition tells us, had been opened in order to prove to the doubter that our Lady had indeed been taken up into heaven. This traditional tomb was full of lilies, and he drew the lilies all growing and blossoming. He drew Saint Thomas looking up and stretching out his hands to our Lady who should, presently, be drawn. Then he turned his attention to the subsidiary figures.

In the extreme left foreground, almost coming out of the picture, he drew the lady abbess as the donor of the picture. She was kneeling, with her hands clasped and her eyes cast down in prayer, and the figure was so like the holy old lady that Fra Filippo laughed as he drew it. Beside her stood a very lovely Saint Margaret with one hand resting affectionately on the abbess's shoulder; but the face of Saint Margaret was suspiciously like the face of Sister Lucrezia. Beyond Saint Margaret stood Saint Gregory with his hand raised in benediction.

On the other side of the picture he drew the three figures which were to balance the composition; Saint Augustine, the Angel Raphael and the saucy child Tobias, looking inquisitively, as children will, at

Saint Thomas whose lack of faith had caused all this to-do. Then Fra Filippo turned his attention to the Madonna.

Now Fra Filippo seems to have reasoned thus: if our Lady had appeared to Saint Thomas in order to give him the solid and material girdle which she had worn on earth, it would be illogical to depict her as though she were ethereal. Besides, he seems to have argued: if our Risen Lord had appeared to the Apostles in material form, breaking bread with them and bidding Saint Thomas feel his precious wounds, after her Assumption our Lady would have appeared to Saint Thomas in like manner. Therefore he drew her in solid and material form, seated on a throne which was half throne, half aureole, supported by two most delightful angels. Of course the Madonna was the living image of Sister Lucrezia, for was not Sister Lucrezia to be, from now onward, his embodiment of our Lady?

Then, having worked with his whole soul in his pen, he leant back in his chair to examine what he had done.

He half closed his eyes, and the composition of the figures came as an absolutely perfect arrangement, perfect in balance and perfect in pattern, giving the exact importance to our Lady that the subject demanded.

"What a beautiful thing!" he murmured.

And, of a truth, no artist has ever excelled the beauty of the composition of Fra Filippo's Madonna della Cintola, and, if Fra Filippo had been able to finish the painting, it would have been one of the most beautiful pictures that the mind of genius has ever conceived and the hand of love

executed. But, sad to say, this picture was never finished by Fra Filippo, and, in the midst of his adorable saints, the clumsy brush of Fra Diamante painted in a Madonna of clay and a Saint Thomas that reminds us of the earth from which he sprang.

Since the drawing had taken him long and the light was fading, the friar lifted up his voice and called for a flask of wine and candles.

V

The housekeeper had scarcely set the wine and candles on the table when there came a loud knocking on the door and she hurried off to see who knocked so imperiously. In a minute she returned, mumbling something, and throwing the chamber door wide open to admit a most glorious personage.

Of all the men of the period there was probably no figure more striking than that of Leon Battista Alberti. Tall, with a white beard and fresh-colored complexion, he was yet in the full strength of his manhood. A natural son of the noble family of Alberti, which counted for something, he was brilliant in feats of strength, agility and sportsmanship which also counted for something; he was a fairly good sculptor and a fairly good painter, which counted for much with Fra Filippo; and he was a brilliant architect, which counted for most of all. Besides all this, Alberti was the close friend of the Tuscan nobles, literati and artists.

Fra Filippo rose to welcome Alberti, embracing him warmly and kissing him on either cheek; and the two men stood together, making a pretty picture, the Florentine in the magnificent scarlet cloth

of Florence which hung from his shoulders in a dignified mantle, and the Carmelite wearing the full white mantle of his order.

"How goes the rupture, Filippo?" asked Alberti.

"Hush!" whispered the friar, glancing at the housekeeper. Then aloud: "You mean the rupture of the muscles of my thigh."

"Of course, I mean the rupture of the muscles of your thigh."

"It is better I think; but this inclement weather tries it somewhat." Then he turned to the woman, who stood listening in the doorway. "Orsola, take away this flagon of Chianti and fetch me a flask of the wine of Lastra and glasses."

As the door closed behind the housekeeper, he looked at Alberti. "Leonello," he said, "I never speak of my rupture here in Prato, for it is a little town and full of gossip."

"Therefore," replied Alberti, smiling, "we may rest certain that the story has spread from Florence and that every man, woman and child in Prato knows of it."

"Nevertheless, silence is golden, chatter damnable. As to my rupture, it is no better nor ever will be. Some day it will be the death of me."

As to Fra Filippo's rupture, it is a story that makes us glad we live in the present age instead of in the Quattrocento. Seven years before, when Fra Filippo was much pressed with work in Florence, he had engaged one Giovanni da Rovezzano as his assistant on the arrangement that he should pay Giovanni the sum of forty golden florins ($1,160 or £240 present value) at the end of a year's work. At the end of the year he dismissed him.

But Giovanni, being very angry at his dismissal, sued Fra Filippo for a year's wages before the episcopal tribunal. The friar protested that he had paid the man and produced his receipt in evidence. Giovanni swore that the money had not been paid and that the receipt was a forgery.

Then the Vicar General of Florence, having but little love for the Carmelites, caused the friar to be put on the rack so that he might be compelled to confess the forgery. Fra Filippo was put to the torture, protesting his innocence. The rack was turned and turned, Fra Filippo still protesting his innocence. One more turn was given and, with that last turn, the poor human body collapsed and the friar's brave fortitude ended. "Fra Filippo," says a contemporary writer, "bore the pain bravely, but confessed when he saw his intestines protruding from his wounds." For, by such a torture a man can be driven to confess any accusation that may be brought against him, and such confessions are now considered to be utterly valueless.

The Medici did not believe the finding of the tribunal, else they could not possibly have continued their warm friendship with one who had been guilty of such a base crime as that of defrauding the laborer of his hire. The nuns of San Niccoló de' Fieri could not have believed Fra Filippo guilty when, shortly after, they appointed him as their chaplain. The authorities of Prato could not have believed him guilty when, two years after, they engaged him to decorate the *pieve*. And no one who knew the friar's handwriting, which was as vile and cramped as his drawing was free and beautiful, could have deemed him capable of forgery. But,

nevertheless, Fra Filippo must have felt the stigma bitterly.

But, whilst we have been considering the story of the friar's torture, the housekeeper has brought the wine of Lastra and removed the flagon of Chianti.

"Now, Little Lion," said Fra Filippo, helping Alberti to wine, "let us turn to a more pleasing subject. What do you think of this drawing?" And he handed him the drawing which he had just finished.

Alberti examined the drawing long and critically. Then he placed it beside him on the table and drank the friar's health in a full glass of wine.

"Will you never be content, my friend?" he asked.

"By Apollo! So you like it?" asked Fra Filippo with an artist's intense anxiety over his newly arriving conception.

"You paint the Sant' Ambrogio Coronation," chided Alberti, "and I think that you have reached perfection. You paint that little *tondo* for Leonardo Bartolini, making your Sant' Ambrogio Coronation look like a sweetmeat. You next paint the frescoes in the *pieve*—I have ridden all the way round by Prato on my way to Pisa in order to see it—in which you excel the work of Masaccio. And now you plan this! But we will discuss your new picture over our supper at the Inn of the Girdle, which is a place that is fitting for the discussion of the Madonna della Cintola. Also I desire to ask you about the frescoes in the *pieve*."

"The frescoes in the *pieve?*" said Fra Filippo with evident distaste; for, in the new conception of the Madonna della Cintola, the Dancing of the

Daughter of Herodias had lost all interest for him.

"The frescoes in the *pieve,* my friend," laughed Alberti, who was not ignorant of the vagaries of the artistic temperament. "But come on, I have ordered a supper worthy of—"

"Worthy of his Holiness," broke in Fra Filippo. "That will please my little Maddalena. Come on, Leonello!"

And, together, they left the house.

"I never saw such goings on," muttered the old housekeeper to herself. "What with this fine gentleman and that fine gentleman, Fra Filippo might be the Sultan of Turkey. Poor Fra Diamante will have to eat his supper alone."

CHAPTER VI

THE DEAD HAND

I

AS Fra Filippo and Alberti entered the dining-room of the Inn of the Girdle, the former known to all in Prato and the latter conspicuous for the flaming richness of his Florentine mantle and his general air of nobility, there was just that hush which marks the arrival of distinguished visitors at any provincial hostelry; as they moved up the room, there was a slight bending forward of those that supped, each man who knew Fra Filippo striving to catch his eye and win his greeting so that he might have a passing share in his scarlet-robed guest.

A table had been reserved for Alberti on the right side of the room and it had been laid with shining spoons and knives—forks had not yet been invented—and brilliant glass; also it had been adorned with bowls of early anemones and late snowdrops. Beside this table stood Maddalena, smiling her welcome.

The sight of Maddalena and the smell of the dining-room brought back to Fra Filippo the memory of the poem which had been promised to him overnight. "Has the minstrel who sang here last night left a manuscript for me, Maddalena?" he asked.

"He is over there at the end table, padre," replied the girl. "Presently, when you have commenced your supper, he says that he will sing for you. Then, when you have finished your repast, he says that he will come over and drink a glass of wine with you and give you your love-song." And she handed a dish of tiny crayfish, first to Fra Filippo, then to Alberti, and left to see about the next course.

"That is a very pretty girl," remarked Alberti, sadly, as he picked out the inside of a crayfish.

"Ho! Ho!" laughed the friar. "Are those your thoughts? It is true that Maddalena is a very sympathetic girl, able to order a most excellent supper; but I had never thought of her as pretty. She is too thickset to be beautiful."

"But she has the divine gift of youth, and a most comely plumpness." Alberti sighed bitterly. "Youth always moves me to sadness: it passes so quickly and is ended. As young Lorenzo de' Medici sang last night:

> 'Fair is youth, but doomed to sorrow,
> For it hourly flies away.
> Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
> Nought ye know about to-morrow.'"

Fra Filippo's eyes twinkled. "So, I believe, do these snowdrops and anemones, the harbingers of spring which Maddalena has placed upon the table, move you to sadness; for they whisper of the storms of autumn and the frosts of winter. But, hark! My minstrel is tuning up."

The minstrel struck a few chords on his lute, giving the name of his song.—

OF FIAMMETTA SINGING

Then he sang the words which have been so admirably rendered into English by Rossetti:

"Love steer'd my course, while yet the sun rode high,
On Scilla's waters to a myrtle-grove:
The heaven was still and the sea did not move;
Yet now and then a little breeze went by
Stirring the tops of trees against the sky:
And then I heard a song as glad as love,
So sweet that never yet the like thereof
Was heard in any mortal company.
'A nymph, a goddess, or an angel sings
Unto herself, within this chosen place,
Of ancient loves;' so said I at the sound.
And there my lady, 'mid the shadowings
Of myrtle-trees, 'mid flowers and grassy space,
Singing I saw, with others who sat round."

There was a murmur of applause, the words as well as the music to which they were set appealing to the guests.

"That was a sonnet by Boccaccio," remarked Alberti. "I know it well." But Fra Filippo seemed sunk in gloom and made no answer.

For a time there was silence. Then: "What are your thoughts, Filippo?" asked Alberti.

"I was wondering, Leonello, why men do not give the same freedom to painters that they give to poets; for the painter is chained to the rendering of holy pictures and is permitted to paint naught else."

"You would that you had the freedom to paint Fiammetta, singing, 'mid the shadowings of myrtle-

trees, 'mid flowers and grassy space, and others who sat round'?"

"Beneath still heavens, and beside a still sea."

"Or the meeting of Dante with Beatrice?" suggested Alberti.

Fra Filippo looked doubtful.

"Or the first intercourse of Cino of Pistoja with Madonna Selvaggia and her two fair companions?"

"No!" cried the friar. "I do not want any set subject, for that would be to exchange one bondage of chains for another; but I desire the same freedom in the choice of a subject that is granted to the poet. How would the poet feel if he were condemned to write of the Nativity, or the Coronation of our Lady, or the mortification of Saint Jerome, one after another, year in, year out? Believe me, the skull of Saint Jerome haunts me, and the rocky landscape which goes with Saint Jerome plunges me in an abominable sense of desolation."

Maddalena had placed a dish of partridges on the table, and Alberti was hard at work picking a plump bird.

"How would you like to paint the triumphs of the ancient gods, Filippo?" asked Alberti, his mouth full.

"What patron would commission such subjects?" laughed Filippo. "If you can persuade Messer Geminiano Inghirami to order a fresco of the Choice of Paris, I will gladly paint it on the wall of the *pieve*."

Again the lute struck up, leaving Leon Battista Alberti free to finish his partridge without distraction.

ON THE DEATH OF MADONNA LAURA

"Those eyes whereof I sang my sweet-tuned melody,
Those arms, those hands, those feet, that face which caught
And isolated me from all I sought
And set me strange and lone among my fellow men,
Those crisply curling locks of fine-spun aureole,
And that entrancing smile which from those eyes
Turned all that compassed me to paradise,
Are now but lifeless dust—their radiance dull.
Yet still I live! whereof I make my sighing,
Lonely, alone without love's quickening fire,
My storm-tossed craft upon cold ocean lying.
Lo! Here I cease the song of my desire;
For fountains of my music are a-dying,
And naught but griefs my lingering chords inspire."

"My minstrel," remarked Fra Filippo, "must have now reached his second flask of old Chianti, with great success, for that sonnet of Petrarch is without doubt lovely."

"What do you mean by his second flask of old Chianti, Filippo?" asked Alberti.

"He says that the first flask used to make his father quote Boccaccio, the second flask used to make him quote Petrarch, and the third flask used to make him quote Dante. Without doubt that habit is inherited."

"Whether the habit be inherited or no, without a doubt that sonnet of Petrarch's is indeed lovely —perhaps the most lovely sonnet that has ever been written."

II

Maddalena had removed the partridges, and they were busy with a savory ragout of wild boar.

"You spoke just now," said Fra Filippo, "about my painting the triumphs of the ancient gods. Is it possible to secure such a commission?"

Alberti's eyes kindled. "As you know, my Filippo," he answered, "Sigismondo Malatesta has lately employed me to rebuild the Cathedral of Rimini in the form of a Grecian temple; and, in the Chapel of Saint Girolamo, which was planned after the idea of Madonna Isotta, the lady of Sigismondo's heart, the likeness to a Grecian shrine transcends belief. For, in this Chapel of Saint Girolamo, there is a bas-relief of Mars in his war-chariot picked out with blue; and, over against it, there is a bas-relief of Venus, all unclad, drawn over the waves in her chariot of swans; nor are bas-reliefs of Mercury, Diana and Saturn absent. Of a truth, the ancient Pagan might have worshiped here side by side with the Christian."

Fra Filippo's brows were knit in a frown. He was too straightforward a man to accept this new idea without question. "What do you suggest?" he asked.

"That Sigismondo might commission you to paint frescoes of the ancient religion and the Christian religion side by side, showing that the old belief was but the natural striving of man after truth, and not contrary to Christianity."

"Let me be clear, my friend," said Fra Filippo, "so that I may not misunderstand your meaning. You would have me paint Venus and our Lady, Jove and the Eternal Father, Orpheus and Saint Francis, side by side?"

Alberti smiled. "I would have you paint Venus as the symbol of what Plato calls the Idea—that is, of the universal law which moves created beings to

physical love—and I would have you paint Venus as presiding at the marriage of a youth and a maiden. I would have you paint our Lady as one who moves Christians to supernatural love, and I would have you paint our Lady as presiding at the spiritual espousal of a nun to her Divine Spouse."

"Is that what Madonna Isotta meant when she planned the bas-relief of Venus, all unclad, in the Chapel of Saint Girolamo?"

Alberti hemmed and hawed, for this was not in the least what Malatesta and his mistress had intended.

Fra Filippo had made up his mind. "I could imagine," he said, "pictures of the pagan gods and goddesses adorning the walls of some Florentine villa, for that would not be unseemly; but to imagine frescoes of the pagan gods adorning the walls of a Christian church is beyond me, and I would take no part in such a work."

"Yet, Filippo, you crave freedom for the painter."

"Yes, Leonello. I crave freedom to paint things of beauty in such places as are suitable. I crave freedom from the dead hand which lays down that art is the handmaid of religion and that the Church must decree the subjects which the artist may paint. I do not crave freedom to paint pagan themes in those places that are sacred to the Christian religion."

And, to the credit of Fra Filippo, it must be said that he never allowed himself to mingle paganism with Christianity. And, when his pupil, Botticelli, adorned the Medici villas with the most perfect

pictures of the ancient gods that have ever been painted, he kept the gods and goddesses for the villas and, unlike many of his contemporaries, painted only sacred subjects in the churches.

III

Alberti and Fra Filippo had finished their ragout of wild boar, and washed their fingers in bowls of clear water, and they had commenced a dish of oranges dressed with aqua-vitæ when the minstrel approached their table.

"We have met before, messere," he said, bowing low to Alberti.

"Both your face and your voice seem familiar to me," replied Leon Battista, "and yet I cannot recall the place nor the time of our meeting."

"Perhaps this will aid your memory, eminence." And, touching his lute, the minstrel sang softly:—

"O beautiful thrushes, that flit and that flutter
Through the green branches, singing delightfully,
Voice me the grief that my lips cannot utter.
Fly to her bed at the dawn, and perch lightfully
High on the head of her bedstead, and, singing there,
Pierce her hard heart that she act not despitefully."

"Yes!" exclaimed Alberti. "That is the Song of Desire which Sigismondo Malatesta addressed to Madonna Isotta."

"That is the song which Sigismondo's cavalry sang as they cantered into action. Then, when they charged, they broke into the devil's own litany, invoking David, Samson, Priam, Paris, and bidding them to:—

'Go! kneel to our Lord, and pray Him to send me,
All warm from her slumber, Isotta!' "

"By Apollo, I have it!" cried Alberti. "You are the minstrel who accompanied Sigismondo's army when he fought for Florence against Naples some eight years since."

"How well I remember the first time I met you, messere," said the minstrel, reminiscently. "The campaign against Naples was ended and my lord Sigismondo had ridden into Rimini with his cavalry, and you had been talking to my lord about feats of endurance and agility. Then the *ragazzi*—the foot soldiers—marched in, and, as they approached the Rocca, Sigismondo ordered them to advance in two single lines, six paces apart. Then Sigismondo withdrew, leaving you standing alone right in the path of the soldiers. And then, just as they reached you and seemed about to march over you, you, standing quite still, leapt over the heads of the first line and, again, over the heads of the second line. By our Lady, it was a miracle!"

"I leapt over the shoulders of the advancing men, guiding my feet so that they passed between their heads," explained Alberti, who was nothing if not truthful.

"Per Bacco!" continued the minstrel. "I shall never forget the privations of that campaign! The country where we were fighting, over against the sea, was barren; the people were fever-ridden; there was no wine and the water reeked of sulphur. And Sigismondo, whose strategy led us to and fro through that wild, desolate country, showed us an example of fortitude, himself eating naught but

mouldy bread and raw acorns, drinking naught but the stinking water, and ever cheering our hearts with the beautiful love-songs which he had made to Isotta."

Fra Filippo broke in, looking at the minstrel. "You know the Cathedral of Rimini?" he asked.

"Well, padre!" answered the minstrel.

"And you know the carving of Venus that adorns the Chapel of Saint Girolamo?"

"Too well, padre."

"And can you tell me whether Sigismondo ordered that carving of Venus to be put up in praise of the natural order of a loving marriage?"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed the minstrel. "They told me at Rimini that my Lord Sigismondo was wont to say that marriage kills love; for, with marriage, love becomes a matter of duty; whereas, without marriage, love is a matter of graciousness. And all know that my Lady Isotta was unbound to Sigismondo by aught save love." Then he recalled his promise of overnight and brought out a manuscript tied up with a strand of silk. "Speaking of love, padre, here is the poem that I promised you. Mind, it is not I who say that the verses were written by the divine Dante."

The friar thanked him warmly, asking him if he could do him any favor in return.

"If you could put in a good word for me with those who are organizing the Carnival, padre," the minstrel said, "I should be grateful; for I have had much experience in Triumphs and Carnival Songs." Then his eye caught sight of some guests leaving the room and, gulping down his glass of wine, he hurried off to collect his contributions.

"And now that we have got rid of this entertaining songster, Filippo," said Alberti, filling the friar's glass and then his own, "I want to talk to you about that fresco of the Dancing of Salome in the *pieve*."

CHAPTER VII

MADONNA HERODIAS

I

NEXT morning Fra Filippo awoke, keen as mustard to get on with the Madonna of the Girdle. For the dissatisfaction of the night before which he had expressed to Alberti had been the result of a day of overwork, and a night's rest had restored his ambition to create a picture that should be something new, and higher than all that he had hitherto painted. Bah! The "dead hand" did not mean the bondage of having to paint religious subjects. In fact, now that he had come to think of it, he wanted to paint religious subjects; but he wanted to paint them in his own way, free from the conventions that had bound him and his brother artists. The spur that had goaded on Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio was exactly the same as the spur that had goaded on Giotto, Masaccio and was now goading on himself—the desire to express the artist's own view of his subject in the best and most vital manner possible.

So, as soon as he had eaten a mouthful of crust and gulped down a glass of wine—he had arranged that Fra Diamante should say Mass at the Convent of Santa Margherita—he took the drawing of the Madonna della Cintola, tucked it into his portfolio, and went over to the *pieve* in order to make ar-

rangements about the fresco of the Dancing of Salome.

The morning was frosty, with that thin mist which holds the promise of a fine and bracing day. There was the stimulating scent of wood-smoke in the air. Men and girls were setting out for their morning's work in the biscuit bakeries and straw-plait factories, chattering and in the best of spirits: and Fra Filippo limped along full of the divine power of one who creates.

II

Now it is impossible to create two masterpieces at the same time without both suffering, and, as our Lady of the Girdle was in the process of creation and the Dancing of Salome well-nigh finished, it was absolutely necessary to hand Salome to Fra Diamante; but, before Salome could be entrusted to the less skilful brush of Diamante, there was one face that Fra Filippo must paint, that of Herodias. Fra Filippo frowned and bit his lip. Then his expression brightened and he turned to his assistant.

"If I paint the face and neck of Herodias, Diamante," he asked, "can I trust you to paint the hair? You have the figure at the high table to guide you."

"Yes, certainly!" replied Diamante, who had visions of painting a head of hair overlaid with those jewels that his heart loved, and felt very sure of himself.

"Then tell the plasterers to lay on the patch for the face of Herodias first thing to-morrow, and I

will try to be ready for them. For I have got the exact idea of Madonna Herodias, who was a noble Roman lady, and I go to prepare the finished drawing. Make a tracing from the cartoon so that I may know the correct size of the face, and let me have it when I come home to dinner."

It is to be feared that Fra Filippo had mixed up "Madonna Herodias," who was a Jewess, with "Madonna Pilate," who was a Roman, and that Fra Diamante was too deeply engaged in planning the jeweled headdress to notice the mistake.

And so Fra Fillipo went off to make a study of his "noble Roman lady"; for are not the Florentines the direct descendants of the most noble families of ancient Roma—at least so the fifteenth-century Florentine historians tell us—and was not Lucrezia de' Buti a Florentine of the Florentines and, therefore, a Roman of the Romans?

III

As Fra Filippo entered the Convent of Santa Margherita, punctual to a moment, the abbess and Sister Lucrezia were coming out of the enclosure, and, opening the door of the room which was reserved for the painting of the altarpiece, he stood aside for them to pass.

Without a word of explanation, the friar brought out the drawing of our Lady of the Girdle which he had made the previous afternoon, and placed it before the abbess. Then he stepped back in order to watch her face.

He saw amazement replaced by understanding, and understanding give way to admiration.

"Then my design satisfies you, abbess?" he asked.

"It is more than I had hoped for," she stammered, "more than I had thought possible."

His eye sought Sister Lucrezia, and his eyebrows went up asking for her opinion. But her eyes were lowered, for it does not become a young nun to express her opinion in the presence of her superiors.

"Santa Margherita is very like our Lady," suggested the abbess, "and both are very like Sister Lucrezia."

"Is that so?" asked the friar, for he had not noticed the strong likeness between Saint Margaret and his model before; and his mind sought a reason for this strange resemblance. "I suppose," he said, quite sincerely, "that, if a religious strives to make her soul like that of the Madonna, her body will share the resemblance. For the soul is the form of the body."

"And that is a very beautiful idea," replied the abbess.

Then Fra Filippo drew a deep breath, knowing that he had to force his will on a woman who was also an abbess. "I should like you to remove Sister Lucrezia's veil and wimple, mother abbess," he said, "in order that I may be able to draw the way in which her head is set on her neck, how her ears are set on her head, and how her hair comes off her forehead."

The abbess did not like this suggestion at all. For a nun to remove a portion of her dress in order that she might show her head would not be seemly.

"But, if you ordered her to do so, dear mother abbess," suggested Fra Filippo, "the act would be

a most seemly act of obedience. Otherwise it will be impossible for me to paint the picture."

"Yet surely you could draw the forehead and hair from some other model—from a model who lives in the world?"

Fra Filippo chuckled and went on to explain a game which artists were accustomed to play amongst themselves. One artist draws the head of some being—whether it is the head of a man, a woman, a beast, or a bird, he does not say—then he folds the paper so that the edge of the neck alone is visible and passes the drawing to the second artist. The second artist, being ignorant of what has been drawn, proceeds to draw a body—man, beast, or bird—and, folding the paper so that the point where the legs should commence alone is visible, passes the drawing to the third artist. The third artist draws the legs and feet. "Believe me, abbess," he chuckled, "when the paper is unfolded, the result is most ridiculous."

The abbess saw whither his argument was leading, and could not hide a smile at his ingenuity.

"Therefore," he ended, "if I paint the features of our most gracious Lady from those of Sister Lucrezia, who is a Florentine, and finish our Lady's neck, forehead and hair from those of a common girl of Prato, the result will be enough to make the angels weep and the devils shake with laughter. Almighty God has given to each face its own proper neck and forehead."

So, with mingled sighs and smiles, the abbess helped Lucrezia to remove her veil and wimple, and

the girl's closely cut head of fine golden hair was uncovered.

Fra Filippo caught up a small black shawl which the young nun had brought into the room, and handed it to the abbess.

"Now brush back the hair from the forehead, mother abbess," said he, " and place this little black shawl over the back of Sister Lucrezia's head—There! Now the effect is not unseemly!"

IV

The mother abbess had gone and, with only one short break to rest his model, Fra Filippo had been drawing hard at the face of our Lady of the Girdle for over an hour, putting down exactly how her hair came off her forehead, how her ears were set on her head, and so on. He had drawn quickly and accurately, and was feeling very well satisfied with the progress he had made—very well pleased indeed.

"Have you ever heard how Florence came to be built, sister?" he asked, stretching himself.

"No, padre," answered Lucrezia, relaxing her pose.

"Then, whilst we refresh ourselves, I will tell you." And, having brought Lucrezia a glass of wine and a plate of biscuits, he helped himself liberally. "It is permitted," he added, smiling, " for it is the custom for the painter and his model to take some refreshment in the middle of the morning, and I asked the abbess's leave before she left the room." But he did not tell the girl that the abbess had answered his request: "If I allow Sister

Lucrezia such an unwonted liberty as that of posing for you unattended, I may as well allow her the lesser liberty of refeshing herself with you."

Sister Lucrezia wrapped the shawl warmly round her head and sat munching the biscuits with obvious enjoyment.

"The ancient city of Fiesole having been overcome and destroyed by the Roman army under Julius Cæsar," began the friar, "Cæsar resolved to build a city on the banks of the Arno which should make it impossible that Fiesole should ever rise again. Certain noble Romans who had assisted in the war against Fiesole came forward to help him; and they brought water from Sesto Quinto, and they built a wall strengthened by towers, and paved the city, and made a Capitol after the pattern of the Capitol at Rome, and brought noble families to inhabit it. And, finding the Valley of the Arno covered with lilies, from whose roots we now make orris-powder, they named this city 'Fiorenza,' which may be interpreted, 'flowery sword.'"

"I never heard that before," said Lucrezia, deeply interested.

"And so," continued Fra Filippo, "the city of Florence is now inhabited partly by the descendants of the ancient Romans, noble and brave, and partly by the Fiesolians, cruel and fierce."

"That, I suppose," suggested Lucrezia, "is the reason why there have always been so many factions and so much fighting among the Florentines."

"Exactly! And you, judging from your name, sister, are a descendant of that noble Roman, Brutus or Butus; for could any name be more Roman than that of Lucrezia de' Buti?"

"Is that why you are painting me as the Madonna of the Girdle, padre?" asked Lucrezia, laughing. "I was always taught that our Lady sprang from the Jews, and not from the Romans."

Fra Filippo wrinkled his forehead in thought. "Somehow or other," he said, "I never think of our Lady as a Jewess. For was not our Lady conceived immaculate, and, therefore, free from the blindness and treachery of the perfidious Jewish race?"

V

"Now, sister," said Fra Filippo, picking up his charcoal, "if you are rested, will you resume your pose." And he went on to tell her of his trouble with the *pieve* frescoes, and of his desire to draw her as Herodias.

"You see," he explained, "if her daughter was old enough to dance before King Herod, Herodias must have been some fifteen years older than you, and I shall paint her world-worn and weary; but I want to draw the noble Roman type of face, and so, if I may, I shall draw your features."

If Lucrezia had been an ordinary girl, she might have objected to sit for a lady of such ill-repute as Herodias; but she was a Florentine who had been brought up amongst poets and painters, and knew enough to understand the subjective nature of Fra Filippo's request—besides, had he not paid her the highest compliment possible in choosing her for the model of the Madonna? But she did resent the idea of posing for a *Jewish* lady of ill-repute; which resentment, considering the universal hatred of the Jews, any Quattrocento girl would have felt.

"Fra Filippo," she asked, "wasn't Herodias a Jewess?"

"No!" he answered. "Herod was the Roman governor."

"It was Pontius Pilate who was the Roman governor. Herod was the Jewish king."

"Diavolo!" he muttered, much upset. "You are right."

Then his face gradually cleared, for the solution of the problem was coming to him. "At any rate," he argued, "Madonna Herodias was of noble birth, and not a Fiesolian."

"That is true," laughed Lucrezia, "she was certainly not a Fiesolian."

"Therefore," cried Fra Filippo, "she must have been of the nature of a Florentine, and, if I hold my tongue, none will be the wiser. Besides, I can get no other model in Prato who will serve my purpose; and, if you do not help me, I do not know what I shall do."

Therefore, for the rest of the morning, Lucrezia posed gladly as the woman of many mortal sins; and Fra Filippo, working as one inspired, finished the drawing to his complete satisfaction.

"Remember," he cautioned, as he packed up his drawing materials, "not a word to mother abbess about the drawing of Herodias, else she will never permit me to enter the Convent of Santa Margherita again."

"Consider my reputation," laughed Lucrezia. "What would mother prioress say if she knew that I had posed as this evil Jewess?"

"Well, at any rate, I have done enough work on

the Madonna della Cintola this morning to satisfy a whole convent of nuns."

Thus, on the basis of the secret of the Herodias drawing, a complete understanding was established between Fra Filippo and the delightful little Augustinian, Lucrezia de' Buti. And, as a secret shared between two people of different sexes does more to break down the hedge of safety than anything else, and that without a suspicion of sin, an immediate intimacy sprang up which was far from safe.

CHAPTER VIII

"TO MY MOST GRACIOUS LADY"

I

WORKING at forced pressure, Fra Filippo had finished the face of "Madonna Herodias" and had handed over the rest of her figure to the tender mercies of Fra Diamante, and he was now free to devote himself to our Lady of the Girdle.

So, as soon as he had prepared sheets of paper that would fit the exact size of the panel, he tacked them on to an old panel which he used for the purpose of a drawing-board, sketched in the rough outlines of the design from the small drawing which he had made, and told his journeyman to carry the whole over to the Convent of Santa Margherita so that he might work at the cartoon. For the Quattrocento painter was wont to paint from a finished cartoon, making a full-sized drawing on paper to begin with, and not starting the gesso-covered panel until the cartoon had been completed. Then, when he came to paint the panel, there would be no scraping out nor painting over what he had already done on the smooth surface of the gesso.

First there came the drawing of the abbess; for not only did Fra Filippo feel that this would please the saintly old lady, but also he saw that it would be wise to draw and paint her whilst she was in comparatively good health and before one of those

mysterious heart attacks, of which she had told him, should render her incapable of posing. So he drew the Abbess Bartolommea de' Bovacchiesi kneeling in the lower left hand corner of the cartoon, and took great pains with her face and got another nun who had a somewhat similar figure to kneel in her stead for the completion of the drawing.

No, the abbess did not wish to be painted in her white habit and the fine rochet (or surplice) which the Canonesses of Saint Augustine always wore. It would be too conspicuous, and she wished her figure to be as little noticeable as might be. She would wear the black mantle of her order, covering the white as much as possible. And as Fra Filippo did not want a glaring patch of white at the corner of his picture, drawing off attention from the main theme and ruining the composition, he expressed his entire agreement with her spirit of humility.

But, whilst, and when, he drew the mother abbess, Sister Lucrezia had to be present; for Sister Lucrezia was to pose for Saint Margaret, and Saint Margaret as Patroness of the Community was presenting mother abbess to our Lady, placing her hand most affectionately on the abbess's head. One could not draw the head of mother abbess without the hand of Sister Lucrezia; besides, since she had been brought into close contact with Lucrezia through the painting of the picture, the abbess had conceived a great affection for her and the frail old body had grown to derive much comfort from the support of the strong young body.

Then came the time when the drawing of mother abbess had been completed, and the finished drawing of Saint Margaret commenced.

"I suppose," Fra Filippo had explained, all on the spur of the moment, "that, if a religious strives to make her soul like that of the Madonna, her body will share the resemblance. For the soul is the form of the body." And now he became possessed with the idea, striving to see the likeness of the Madonna in the person of Sister Lucrezia and to reproduce this same likeness in the figure of Saint Margaret.

Gone was all the friar's desire after mere physical beauty, gone was the material touch that had made his Sant' Ambrogio Coronation of our Lady so disappointing, and his hand became inspired with a tender dignity that surpassed anything which Fra Angelico had attained. And, what is more, his pupils in later years caught this breath of mystical beauty from the Santa Margherita of the Girdle, and Sandro Botticelli painted the same figure, drawn from Lucrezia de' Buti, in the Adoration of the Magi now in the London National Gallery, and Filippino Lippi painted the same Lucrezia—only then his mother was somewhat older—as the Madonna in the Vision of Saint Bernard which hangs in the same gallery.

But, returning to historical fact, this Santa Margherita of the Madonna della Cintola is the true portrait of Lucrezia de' Buti, painted by the friar in his tenderest and most spiritual manner.

II

They were alone in the room which had been devoted to the destined altarpiece, Fra Filippo and Sister Lucrezia, Lucrezia standing with her hand

resting on the head of a dummy abbess, and Fra Filippo lost in his task. Gradually, as the artist drew and his brows grew fierce with concentration, all his soul in his fingers, the poor model began to feel that her head was as heavy as lead and her feet a mass of pins and needles.

Fra Filippo stepped back to see what he had achieved; and Lucrezia, as she tried to move, stumbled forward like a blind kitten.

"There, I can do no better," cried Fra Filippo, catching her, "though the Vicar General of Florence were to torture me." Then he became vastly perturbed at his want of consideration and, having seated Lucrezia in a chair, fetched her a glass of wine.

"When God started to create the world, sister," he suggested, "I believe that He was carried away by the act of creation and created regardless of consequences. Thus He created the wolf and the scorpion and the snake, and later on the Vicar General of Florence, so that He might materialize His idea of pure evil; not, as Saint Augustine says, in order that He might exercise the righteous. Certainly, when I was creating Santa Margherita just now, I had no thought for my poor model."

The girl laughed at his ingenious apology, in which he had managed to cast the blame on his Creator. "My limbs seemed to go to sleep, padre. They are all right now."

"Then you are able to tell me what you think of this Santa Margherita?"

She looked, and gasped. "Madonna mia!" she cried. "Is this figure really I?"

He chuckled, tremendously pleased with himself. "It is Sister Lucrezia as I see her."

Lucrezia blushed. Surely no man could have paid her a more heady compliment than the artist had just paid; and she began to talk quickly of the grace with which the figure had been drawn and to praise the natural way in which her hand seemed to rest on the head of mother abbess.

"Well, what do you think of Saint Margaret?" persisted Fra Filippo, eyeing her out of the corners of his eyes.

"I think that our Lady must have guided your hand," answered Lucrezia, now mistress of herself. And, being thoroughly in earnest over the picture, they began to discuss the two figures which had already been drawn, and Fra Filippo explained exactly how the other figures would come.

III

Fra Filippo helped himself to wine and, feeling in his pocket, brought out a somewhat crumpled manuscript.

"You know much of Dante, sister," he said. "Can you tell me whether these verses were written by the divine poet?"

She denied expert knowledge, vehemently; but, nevertheless, she read the poem through, read it through a second time, and smiled. "It is a most beautiful poem," she said, "and does the poet much credit; but I do not think that it is by Dante."

"Why?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "How can one

say?" she answered. Then an explanation came to her. "One might say that a picture was a very beautiful picture, but not by Fra Filippo. Do you understand?"

He nodded his head; for, thanks to her illustration, he now understood perfectly.

Then she read the poem aloud to herself, and also to him.

"Lady, I love you! love you, dear, so much
That Love is burning with a white-hot flame,
Searing mere passion into lifeless dust.
First, when I met you, e'er this true Love came,
Your presence thrilled me, heart and every nerve;
Yet, even then, my Love deserved its name,
For, when I met you, there was this reserve
That, though you thrilled me to my inmost core,
I only thrilled to worship and to serve.

"Now, Lady mine, hath Love scorched up the straw,
Leaving the flame, yet searing all that's base:
Wonderous Love, its flames grow more and more!
Yet, since no love can burn without fresh grace—
E'en holy Love needs fuel, else it dies—
So, dear, my Love draws ardor from your face.
For, in your face, and in your shining eyes,
Love seeks its virtue, till my Love is such
That it will burn for you all Angel-wise.

"I watch your lips, no thought of earthly touch;
I watch your lips, moved by your gracious soul,
Till Seraphs doubt how man can love so much.
I watch those lips, seeing the smiles that stole
Upwards and outwards from the soul's delight,
And my poor heart, once earth-bound, now is whole.
I watch your eyes—Love, turn those eyes towards me!—
I watch those eyes, and, watching, I adore
Until my Love shall flame eternally."

"It is a very lovely thing," she said softly.

"But not by Dante?"

She shook her head. "No! Certainly not!" she answered. "But it is by one who has studied Dante deeply."

"Why?"

"Why? Because in *Il Convito* Dante has all those ideas of which the poet writes. He pictures a Lady. Sometimes he speaks of her as Beatrice, sometimes as Philosophy, sometimes as the Soul, and he writes 'discoursing of the virtue of the eyes of this fair Lady most profoundly.' He speaks of the Soul as showing herself in the Eyes and in the Mouth, which two places may be termed the balconies of the woman who dwells in the house of the body, she being the Soul; because there, although veiled as it were, the Soul often shows itself."

"Go on, Lucrezia," said Fra Filippo, softly.

She quoted: " 'The Soul shows itself so evidently in the eyes that it is possible to know its present passions. And with whichsoever of these the Soul is impassioned, there comes into the window of the Eyes the semblance of it, unless it be repressed within, and shut from view by great power of will.

" 'It reveals itself in the Mouth, like color behind glass as it were. And what is a smile or a laugh except a shimmering of the Soul's delight, a light shot outwardly from that which shines within?

" 'Ah,' cries Dante, 'the sweet wonder of my Lady's smile, which is never seen but in her eyes!'

" 'Rain from her beauty little flames of fire,' he cries, 'creating good thoughts, and destroying those inborn vices which are the foes of all the thoughts that are good.' Is not all this, Fra Filippo, the heart and soul of the poem?"

"It is more beautiful," he answered, speaking softly, "than any poem."

Lucrezia bent her head in assent, and they were silent for a while.

IV

Helping himself to wine, Fra Filippo seated himself on the corner of the table.

"What do you think, sister," he asked presently, "of the possibility of such a love as is set forth in this poem? The minstrel who gave me the verses ridiculed the idea."

The girl tossed her closely cropped golden head, which, for the purpose of the picture, was covered only with a filmy lace veil. "That minstrel," she cried, "must have been an animal with no understanding. 'I cannot attain to the higher state,' said the pig, 'therefore it is impossible!' "

"Then you think it possible?"

"Of course!" she cried. "Did not Dante attain to the perfect love? And Petrarch? And Saint Catherine? And ten thousand other Saints?"

Then a wave of holy prudence came over Lucrezia. "Ought you not to be getting on with the drawing of Saint Margaret, padre?" she suggested.

"I have done a day's work on Saint Margaret," he snapped. "No! I have done a month's work—a lifetime's work—and I can do no more. The rest is merely careful drawing."

The girl suffered her eyes to rest on the perfect face of Santa Margherita, which seemed to her to have come by no less than a miracle. "I am sorry, padre," she murmured.

"Then let us talk of the poem." And the friar sipped his wine.

And so Lucrezia de' Buti set her brilliant young Florentine intellect to work, for the female mind in Florence of the Quattrocento was far in advance of the young person of to-day and earlier matured.

"Dante thought that such a Love was readily attainable," said she. "So did the other poets and philosophers."

"They talk of it now," replied the friar, "as the Doctrine of Love according to Plato."

"Bah!" she answered, with a supreme contempt. "Plato was but a pagan." And, in this speech, she merely voiced the opinion of the Aristotlean against the Platonist.

"Eh?" said Fra Filippo, who had chiefly come across the Platonists, and had grasped their doctrines very superficially.

"Plato teaches," she explained, "that the soul of a man or a woman has had a previous existence in some celestial realm, and that all the strivings after the ideal are but a faint memory of the former life. Aristotle teaches that the soul was freshly created by God, after, and according to, His own pattern, and that the human soul has of itself a certain yearning towards righteousness."

All this was beyond Fra Filippo; but it struck a note which reechoed his early training in the Carmine. "That seems very good theology," he hazarded.

"It is Christianity," she answered most dogmatically, for the Florentine Aristotlean was nothing if not dogmatic. "Plato taught paganism, Aristotle taught Christianity."

"And this poem?" asked Fra Filippo, striving to get on to firm ground.

"It sings of the goodness and beauty of the Lady burning up all that is base in the man who loves her."

"And the Lady—is she immune?"

"If a maiden has inspired such a love in the heart of a man, can she be false to the grace which God has given her? No!" she cried. "The Lady will search her heart and purify her soul so that she may be worthy of the Love which she has inspired."

"And, if I ventured to offer you such a love, Lucrezia?"

"I should be proud and honored to accept it."

And the glamour of a great romance fell upon them, a romance that was too precious, too sacred, for further speech. For they forgot that they were a man and a woman, and imagined that such a love must be "all Angel-wise."

V

Then Fra Filippo put in a good hour's work, finishing the face of Santa Margherita, and catching the soul of Lucrezia as it shone through her eyes and revealed itself in her mouth. But, as for Lucrezia, like Fra Filippo on that first night in which he had conceived this love, she danced amidst the stars.

The door opened, and mother abbess came in to inspect the morning's work.

"Oh, Fra Filippo!" she cried. And, going over to Lucrezia, she kissed the sweet Saint Margaret.

CHAPTER IX

THE CARNIVAL

I

FRA FILIPPO had finished the drawing of the abbess and Saint Margaret, and was preparing to draw the figures of the Archangel Raphael and the child Tobias. The little son of the woman who brought the milk to the convent, plus the friar's experience of child-painting, would furnish the little Tobias; and now he proposed that Lucrezia, who was very fond of the child, plus the cartoons of several old studies of angels which he had made, would serve as the model of the archangel who was leading Tobias by the hand.

"But the Archangel Raphael was not a woman," objected mother abbess.

"Nor was Saint Raphael a man," laughed Fra Filippo.

The abbess was puzzled. She had never thought of that before.

"Fancy drawing Saint Raphael with a beard and bulging muscles!" suggested Fra Filippo, driving his argument home.

"That is true," owned the abbess. "A man as an archangel would be even worse than a woman."

"If Sister Lucrezia were to let her hair grow a trifle longer," said Fra Filippo, "and you were to arrange it with a fillet like this." And he drew a rapid sketch of what he wanted. "I should have

the very model I require. Besides the child is always good with her and, if she holds his hand and tells him stories, he will give me no trouble."

Thus the difficulty of the Archangel Raphael and the young Tobias was overcome. But how so young a child was to marry Sara the daughter of Raguel did not occur to them any more than it occurred to most painters of the fifteenth century.

II

Now few biographers and historians seem to realize that the life of the average man is variegated. For they seem to assume that a man is either good or bad, and, having thus labeled him, they gloss over the failings of a good man, and ascribe the basest motives to the best actions of him whom they have labeled "bad."

Make the so-called good man human, and you will find weeks, months, or even years, when he had allowed himself to grow slack and has committed many of the meaner venial sins. Give the so-called bad man the gift of faith, and you will find that there are periods when he has honestly repented and has honestly striven to do right. Nay, more, go into your own room, lock the door, make a diagram of your own life, with a datum-line showing the division between good and bad, and you will be surprised to find how often and how seriously your line of conduct has fallen below the datum-line.

The worst of this habit of labeling the character of a man is that, too often, he is labeled at his own valuation and, if he professes to be religious,

his biographers condone such terrible habits as that of pride or self-superiority. If he makes no religious profession, his biographers can find no good in him.

Judging from his pictures, Fra Filippo was honestly religious in his early life; slack, with a tendency towards self-indulgence and possibly some lapses from morality, when he cut loose from his order and mixed with the gay world of artistic Florence.

But since the friar had come to Prato, placing his financial affairs in the hands of the *proposto,* he had turned over a new leaf; and, since he had formed his friendship with Lucrezia, he had most honestly striven to live up to the standard of his Lady.

At the present time, he had found an excellent confessor and had made his confession with a view to keeping a strict Lent; for he had many sins of self-indulgence that needed to be shriven. And, when he said his Mass on Shrove Tuesday, he commenced the Offertory with recollected thoughts and with a serious intention of offering up the Holy Sacrifice for his own "countless sins, transgressions, and failings," as well as for the other intentions of the Church.

III

As the friar was finishing his morning's sitting and preparing to go home to dinner, the abbess entered the room. "I hope you will not be shocked at what I have done, Fra Filippo," she said, a little nervously.

He assured her that he was not easily shocked,

asking her what indiscretion she had committed—if, for instance, she had allowed her nuns to take part in the Carnival.

"Many of the gentlemen are taking part this year," she said, feeling her way.

"But, as far as I know, mother abbess, no nuns." And his eyes twinkled.

"And my nephew, Piero de' Bovacchiesi, is leading the knights who are going to form a guard of honor round King Carnivale."

"Excellent! The *proposto* says that it is the duty of the gentry to take part in the amusements of the people so that their influence may help propriety."

"And my nephew came to see me yesterday, and he asked me if I would allow the nuns to look out of the windows at the procession as it passed—if so, he would arrange that it should pass the convent as it started from the Piazza of the Pieve, instead of as it returned—and I weakly gave my consent."

"A very wise thing to do," said the friar. "The life of a nun has but little change and but little recreation, especially where mother prioress has control."

"But I gave my permission, not for the sake of my nuns, but because I myself wanted to see my nephew ride by in his armor," sighed the abbess bitterly.

"And a very natural reason too," answered Fra Filippo sharply, for he had no patience with scruples. "Do you think that this treat will do your nuns any harm?"

"No!" rapped out the abbess. "Else I should not have granted the privilege."

"And would you have granted the leave if I or the *proposto* or any other had sought it?"

"If the request had been brought before me by some prudent person, I should most probably have granted it." The conscience of mother abbess was feeling relief.

"Then don't examine your motives too closely, dear mother," said Fra Filippo, "or you will end with giving yourself scruples. Nearly all motives are mixed, and most privileges are granted through influence. Does not even Almighty God extend mercy to the wicked in response to the prayers of the just?"

Of course, it is very doubtful whether Fra Filippo could have given such wise advice if he had not been in an unusually virtuous state of mind. On the other hand, it is certain that, from this moment, the abbess held an exaggerated idea of the friar's wisdom and goodness. But then, as the witty Soliano says:

"We most deceive, when most we strive towards good;
For then we show a fleeting better self."

IV

The Tuscan day was bright, and very mild for February, and, at an hour after midday, the Carnival procession left the Square of the Pieve, where it had mustered, and swept past the Convent of Santa Margherita and into the Piazza del Mercatale. This, since it split up the procession into details, allowed the nuns a most perfect view of all that went on.

The first thing that impressed the sisters was that

they had conceived no idea of the great number of people in Prato, nor could they have imagined the sober Prato folk so gay and merry. Then the crowd moved, some going forward and some pressing close to the sides of the street, and a company of knights appeared round the corner, led by the Cavaliero Piero de' Bovacchiesi, wearing bright armor and mounted on prancing horses. The mother abbess, growing very pale, pressed close to the window and waved her hand as her favorite nephew looked up.

These knights were followed by four trumpeters blowing loudly, and these again were followed by two heralds proclaiming the absolute rule of King Carnivale. The heralds wore tabards of stiff red silk, bearing the royal arms—a sirloin of beef proper, supported by two golden cocks rampant—and then came King Carnivale. Who can describe the generous appearance of the King, with his white beard and his very ruddy cheeks? From his cheerful countenance and mighty paunch to the sleek white mule which he rode, he was the very embodiment of good living! A small party of knights formed his rearguard.

Next the procession of the Guilds commenced, each Guild separated from the next by a fair interval so that the detail should be complete in itself as it passed a certain point. The whole being led by a choice choir of men and boys who, as they left the Square of the Pieve and approached the Convent of Santa Margherita, sang:

"Joyful we, on this our day,
Ere our license fades away,
Ere the Lenten Fast begins
And we mourn us for our sins.

Carnivale is passing fast,
Feast and revel whilst permitted;
Earthly joys do never last;
Let no pleasure be omitted."

"But this is like Florence!" whispered Lucrezia to her sister, Spinetta.

Then the ancient Guild of the Wool Merchants came, including in their ranks all the freemen of the Guild, from those who bought and sold wool to those who made cloth, and headed by a white lamb as the emblem of the Guild. They sang:

"Headed by the Holy Lamb,
We, the first of all the Guilds,
Clip the wether and the ram.
Of our cloth the craftsman builds
Well-cut tunics, dainty hosen,
Scarlet cloaks, as may be chosen,
Hiding one and hiding all
From the shame of Eva's fall."

"Like men," laughed Lucrezia, "they throw all the blame on poor Eve."

"For shame!" whispered mother prioress. "It was woman who first of all ate the apple and tempted man."

And Lucrezia felt as though a jug of icy-cold water had been poured down her back.

It would be wearisome to describe how the Guild of Saint Luke's, a strange mixture of apothecaries and artists—the Saint was both a physician and an artist—followed, and how the other Guilds, each singing an appropriate song, followed in due order. Whilst they passed, the crowd was orderly; but, as soon as the unofficial cars began to make their appearance, the fun waxed fast and furious.

There was the Car of The Gay Cats, clad in furs and calling to the Tom Cats who walked beside them. There was the Car of The Naughty Dogs, who carried on most disgracefully. There was the Car of The Well Nurtured, bearing the fattest people in Prato, and a dozen more. The people pelted those in the cars with flowers and sweetmeats—and one can imagine the joy that followed a hit on the eye with a soft cream confection—and the people in the cars pelted back. And all the time grotesquely attired dwarfs ran in and out of the crowd, thumping every one with bladders, insulting the men and exchanging rough jests with the women.

Lastly there came the Car of The Carnevale—Farewell to Meat—occupied by butchers cutting up juicy joints and followed by a procession of men clad in black from head to foot and carrying huge wax candles, even as the Order of the Misericordia are habited to-day. This was to signify that, when the brief reign of Carnival was ended, the Fast of Lent would begin in all its rigor. This gave the crowd creeps and crawls down their backs, and they just loved it.

The procession was bound for the hamlet of Filsitole, where refreshment would be served, and then back to the Square of the Pieve. It certainly reflected great credit on the organization of the minstrel and was the best procession that had taken place for years.

"Sister dear," said Lucrezia to Sister Simona di Michele Lottieri, "I do not know when I have enjoyed myself so much."

"And mother prioress is simply bubbling over

with spleen," replied Sister Simona. "Won't we catch it to-morrow!"

"Offer it up as a mortification," laughed Lucrezia.

"I am full to overflowing with mortifications of that kind," sighed Sister Simona; "and they are so unnecessary too."

V

When a religious is permitted to go out into the world, it is customary for his superior to dispense him from the strict rule of his order and to permit him to follow the same life as that of the secular clergy—the Divine Office every day and meat whenever the rest of Christendom is allowed to indulge. It is to be feared that Fra Filippo had sometimes omitted to say his Office, which was a grievous sin; but he had never disregarded the fasts or abstinence of the Church. Now, in this Lent of 1456, conscious that gluttony was one of his besetting sins, he had resolved to give up the Inn of the Girdle and to fast to the best of his ability. But, before Lent, there was the Carnival, and this night he meant to have the best supper that human skill could achieve.

So, having invited Fra Diamante, Ser Piero Vannozzo the notary, and the minstrel to sup with him, Fra Filippo consulted with Maddalena as to the bill of fare. Those delightful little crayfish, costoletta alla minuta, a young roast peacock, oranges fortified with aqua-vitæ and roast chestnuts with the wine.

"And that," said Maddalena, "should keep you alive until Mid-Lent comes."

The supper was a merry one. Fra Filippo, at

peace about his soul, was very kind to poor Brother Body; Ser Piero, lawyer and Procurator to the Convent of Santa Margherita, moistened his dry person lavishly; Fra Diamante talked little and ate much; whilst the minstrel, inflated with praise for the success of the Carnival procession, let himself go. As for the rest of the guests: first "the tongue is silent whilst the knife speaks" and then, hunger being satisfied, the tongues ran as fast as the Florentine horses run for the *palio*.

"Are you going to join the dancers, friend minstrel?" asked Fra Filippo, as the minstrel finished his last chestnut and helped himself to wine.

"No!" replied the minstrel, shuddering. "In Florence, where the people do indeed dance, I dance with the best; but in Prato, where people get on their hind legs and prance like bears, I leave dancing alone. Ah, speaking of dancing, you should have seen my Gay Cats this afternoon after they had placed some new wine beneath their fur!"

"But," laughed Fra Filippo, "the *proposto* says that the educated should take part in the amusements of the people."

"And play hide and seek with the girls in the shadows of the bystreets?" snorted the minstrel. "Fie! Fie! Fra Filippo. To-night I leave Madonna Venus alone and devote myself to Bacchus and the Muses." And tuning his lute he sang:

"Nature calls the tune: we sing!"—Old Proverb.

"Let the starving man be faint and hungry;
Let the thirsty man be parched with drought;
Let the youth and maid be strained and panting
To express the theme which nature's chanting.

'Tis a fast day—meat is handy;
There's no liquor except brandy;
Maid and lad together flung;
There's alas! no wedding ring:
Nature's strong—The rest is sung
By the mere imagining.

"Sandro's well-nigh starving; he's no glutton
Though he eat his bellyful of meat;
Parched Pippo takes what seemeth sweeter,
Perhaps 'tis water, perhaps 'tis aqua vitæ.
There's one craving stronger still,
Call it love, or what you will:
Tuscan lad's a virile man;
Tuscan maid's as warm as sun;
Both together dare the ban
Of the Church—The rest is sung.

"If our Sandro, suffering naught of hunger,
Planned a greedy, guzzling, drawn-out meal;
If our Pippo, when he'd drunk his measure,
Went on drinking for his lustful pleasure,
Till he saw ten thousand stars
Skipping round the planet Mars
Both, as men, would cease to be;
And the vices which they cherish
Make the pair just one degree
Lower than the beasts that perish.

"He who plots a maiden's dire undoing,
Honeyed words and endless presents rich,
Gloating o'er his secret plans of evil,
Is a cross between a beast and devil.
No! Our warm-soul'd Tuscan maid
But obeyed what nature said.

The lad could not afford a ring;
The maiden had no thought of sinning;
The couple danced Dame Nature's fling:
The rest developed in the singing."

"For shame!" chuckled Ser Piero. "And Fra Filippo present."

But the friar fingered his wine-glass and smiled benignly. People were not shocked at the plain statement of natural facts in the Quattrocento, nor was the standard of morality less high in consequence.

And so the evening passed with song and flagon.

VI

"The song of the minstrel, padre!" whispered Maddalena, as she helped Fra Filippo on with his cloak. "I am in sore trouble and there is none to help me save you. Can I see you on the morrow?"

"Yes. An hour after dinner at my house," he whispered back.

Maddalena gave a sigh that was half a sob.

CHAPTER X

MADDALENA

I

FRA FILIPPO, assisted by Fra Diamante, had blessed the ashes and said Mass at the Convent of Santa Margherita; had said his office right up to Vespers; and then, without a pause, he had settled down to the careful drawing of young Tobias. For the fast of those days was a fast indeed, without any bread and coffee to break its severity, and it lasted right on until dinner. Of course one might make the dinner hour a little early: that would be reasonable.

The morning's drawing of the boy Toby had gone well. The lad, tired out with yesterday's merrymaking and recovering from a severe attack of over-repletion, had been too sluggish to fidget, and the Archangel Raphael (Lucrezia) had no trouble to keep him quiet.

What had Fra Filippo thought of yesterday's festa? had asked Lucrezia.

Most creditable, and Fra Filippo had seen none of that looseness and lovemaking that marked the Florentine carnival. Now that he came to think of it, he had not been in a position to notice what went on towards evening and he supposed that human nature was much the same all Italy over, the satyrs spreading their snares for the nymphs in the

shade of the thickets and, here in Prato, in the shadows of the bystreets.

If Fra Filippo had not been seeing what went on —and Lucrezia in her convent could not imagine any one missing the smallest shred of the life and gaiety—what had he been doing?

"Making a pig of myself in the Inn of the Girdle," he grumbled, "with Fra Diamante, the minstrel and another to keep me company."

"Eh?" laughed Lucrezia. "So you supped on husks and water like the prodigal son? A worthy way to begin Lent, padre."

"There was a dish of crayfish, a hash of veal, a roast peacock, very tender, oranges and chestnuts," replied Fra Filippo, reminiscently.

"Truly, like most sophisticated swine, padre!"

Then Lucrezia's experiences came out. Yesterday had been heavenly, reminding her of the days in Florence, and they had ended with a delightful supper to which the abbess had added several little luxuries. After supper the abbess had retired to her cell thoroughly tired out.

"I do not think she is very well," said Lucrezia.

"Heaven! Then I must start her portrait on the panel as soon as possible," cried Fra Filippo. "If she gets another of her heart attacks my picture is done for until she recovers."

Well, after the abbess had retired to her cell, mother prioress had stepped into her post of authority, and she had lectured them for a whole hour on the custody of the eyes, the guard of the tongue and modesty of demeanor.

"And how could we observe custody of the eyes,"

asked Lucrezia, "when mother abbess had given us leave to look out of the windows and had bidden us enjoy the carnival?"

"Patience, child," said Fra Filippo, drawing hard at the fish which Tobias was holding.

Lucrezia shook her head. "It is easy to counsel patience when one is free from mother prioress, padre. The worst of it is that the sisters are grumbling continually, which does not make life any easier."

"Tut! Tut!" replied the friar, misquoting Scripture most shamefully. "Man and woman are born to trouble e'er mother prioress flies upward. You must not think that I am unsympathetic," he added.

II

After a meal of salt fish, which his soul detested, and cheese, Fra Filippo waited in his living-room for the coming of Maddalena. "I told her to come an hour after the commencement of dinner," he mused, "and I forgot to say that my dinner would be early." So he took out his breviary and read Vespers, very careful to articulate each word distinctly.

He had just got to the Antiphon of our Lady, when there was a knock at the door and his housekeeper showed in the maid from the Inn of the Girdle.

"A moment, child," said Fra Filippo, glancing up, and he finished the Antiphon very carefully.

"Now," he said, closing the book and smiling, "what's your trouble, Maddalena?"

The girl grew very red and cleared her throat,

looking him straight in the face, nevertheless. And she quoted:

> "The lad could not afford a ring.
> The maiden had no thought of sinning;
> The couple danced Dame Nature's fling:
> The rest developed in the singing."

She had evidently thought out how she should tell him, and the quotation came out very aptly.

"Eh? That trouble?" said the friar, careful not to look shocked, for he was in very good dispositions. "Sit down, child, and tell me, if you can, who the man was."

"Piero Bov'chiesi, padre."

"Piero de' Bovacchiesi?" he repeated, inwardly horrified; for, if the man were the Cavaliero Piero de' Bovacchiesi, a knight of good family, he could not reasonably hope to make him right the wrong and marry the girl. "What could have induced you to have yielded to the Cavaliero de' Bovacchiesi, Maddalena?"

"Heaven forbid, padre!" cried the girl. "Not the Cavaliero Bovacchiesi; but Piero Bov'chiesi, the son of him who was the gardener of the family."

"Thank God!" murmured the friar, who had not in the least relished the task of reprimanding the nephew of mother abbess. "Now tell me all about it."

"Piero, my Piero, padre, is a gardener and he had asked me to marry him these six months." And she went on to tell how they had fallen from chastity last Christmas. It was a clear case of impulsive foolishness with "the maiden had no

thought of sinning"; and he had given up his regular work and taken to jobbing gardening. "There is more money to be made in that way, padre, and he did so want to marry me and make things right."

Then, last January, Piero had broken his arm, and no one would employ a one-armed gardener. And he had a mother dependent on him, and now most of his small savings had gone and Maddalena's too. And Maddalena was going to have a baby, and she did not know what to do.

"How soon are you expecting your baby, child?" asked the friar.

"In nine months last Christmas, padre."

"That will be in July," said he, quite inaccurately.

"Yes, padre." She would have agreed to anything.

Then Fra Filippo sat still, his hand resting on his chin, deep in the same generous thoughts that had moved him to impoverish himself at the beginning of his career so that he might support his orphan nieces.

"Is Piero ready to marry you?" he asked, presently.

"As soon as it is possible, padre," she answered.

"Then," said he, "you must marry him at once. For, not only is it a sin to live as you have lived; but, also, it will be an aspersion on your good name when the baby is born."

"Yes," she murmured, not in the least seeing how the marriage might be achieved.

"Now I have a house in the beginning of the Via delle Tre Gore," he said.

"I know it, padre," she answered.

"And I am getting rid of the caretaker, who is

past her work, and you must take charge. And I have a garden close by, and Piero must tend that garden and grow choice vegetables. And you must fit up the front room as a vegetable shop, for vegetables are both scarce and dear in Prato."

"God reward you!" she cried.

"Can you cook?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then you can cook for those who take the rooms and I shall make more money from the rent." Thus did he remove the sense of obligation and restore the girl's self-respect.

"Now, down on your knees, Maddalena, and make a full and true confession. Then I will see Piero and arrange for your marriage." He thought a moment. "I suppose I must get a dispensation for you to be married in Lent," he said. "But there is a just cause and there should be no difficulty. I will see the *proposto*."

The girl made her confession, and rose from her knees, her face alive with smiles.

"I think that God will permit me to have a good supper," said Fra Filippo, thoughtfully. "So I will sup at the Inn of the Girdle to-morrow. But, remember, Maddalena, it must be a light meal and not meat. Some of those crayfish, for instance, and a flask of that Falernian."

The Catholic Church teaches that God sometimes rewards a kindly and generous act in this life, and He rewarded Fra Filippo for his act of kindness when he needed it most.

III

Fra Filippo saw Piero Bov'chiesi, and liked the lad. He fixed up his marriage with Maddalena and left him overcome with gratitude.

He saw the *proposto* and found no difficulty in obtaining a dispensation for the Lenten marriage.

Then, as the evening was drawing in and there was no Inn of the Girdle for him that night, he said Matins and Lauds for the morrow, supped lightly with Fra Diamante, and went to bed.

"Lucrezia will be pleased with what I have done," he thought as he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE PAINTING OF A SOUL

I

FRA FILIPPO was extraordinarily prompt in carrying out his good resolutions this Lent. So, leaving the cartoon of Saint Raphael half-finished, he got out the panel, outlined the cartoon of the abbess on the surface of the gesso, and had the panel carried over to the Convent of Santa Margherita.

The abbess had grown very feeble within the last few days and, as she knelt for her likeness, the friar felt shocked at her appearance and thankful that he had not put off painting her until it was too late. Sister Lucrezia stood beside her with her hand on the abbess's head, so that she might support the frail old lady.

"I am afraid I am not strong enough to talk, Fra Filippo," said the abbess.

"All the better for the picture, abbess," he answered. "You are praying, not chattering."

"Let Sister Lucrezia talk," she said, "that is, if it will not distract you."

"Talk, Sister Lucrezia!" laughed Fra Filippo.

It is a terrible thing to be told to talk, and Lucrezia felt tongue-tied. "What shall I talk about, padre?" she asked.

"Talk about Dante and the soul."

"Shall I tell how the soul becomes?" she asked. "That is in *Il Purgatorio,*" she added.

"Yes, how the soul becomes," he answered, mingling the flesh tints with egg and fig-sap, ready to begin.

In her clear, sweet, cultured Florentine voice she began to recite:

"Man's perfect blood, which never is drunk up
By arteries, and which like food remains
Upon the banquet table when men sup,
Draws from the heart the virtue which maintains
The self that forms the body in its parts,
And travels through that body by its veins.
Again digested, blood descends and starts
In secret vessel, whence it is discharged
And into other vessel quickly darts.
These mingle, passive one, the other charged
With full activity, derived from whence
It lately came, with vital force enlarged;
And being conjoined, this force becomes immense,
Coagulating first, then making whole
The lifeless matter all inert and dense."

The girl paused a second for the sake of the clearness of the meaning, then went on:

"The active virtue, being made a soul
As of a plant—as such, already seals
The vegetative basis of the whole—
Then acts so much that now it moves and feels
Like a sea-fungus, and then makes a start
To take the parent's form which it reveals,
By virtue from the generator's heart,
Which now, O Son, contracts and now distends
Where nature is intent on any part."

Again Lucrezia made the pause needful for the full meaning, and went on:

"But how from animal to man ascends?
Thou dost not see as yet; it is a point
On which a wiser man than thou offends,
Making the soul entirely disjoint
From passive intellect, because he found
No organ for the latter's use appoint."

Once again a descriptive pause, then:

"Open thy mind to truth that's sane and sound:
As soon as in the fœtus the new brain
With perfect convolutions doth abound,
The Primal Mover turns to it again,
Well pleased with such a perfect work existing,
Creates a simple spirit for this fane.
What spirit finds attracts it unresisting
To this sane substance, and becomes one soul,
Which lives, and feels, and thinks, all self-subsisting."

"I shall borrow a copy of Dante's *Il Purgatorio,* and study it in that," said Fra Filippo, speaking softly; for the mother abbess, lulled by the sweet sound of Dante's poetry as read by Lucrezia, was sleeping peacefully as she rested against the girl. "Perhaps in a few weeks I shall comprehend the meaning."

"Nonsense, padre," said Lucrezia, after a glance at the slumbering abbess, speaking equally softly. "Dante means that the becoming baby first has a soul like a little vegetable, which it has derived from its father; then, when the form is sufficiently developed to demand a higher type of soul, the soul

of a little animal takes its place; then, when the brain of the embryo bambino is sufficiently developed to be worthy of a human soul, God creates the human soul which, entering into the bambino, absorbs the perfections of its vegetable and animal soul, and becomes the human soul complete."

"I suppose one ought to know all that," sighed Fra Filippo, "because one learnt it at the Carmine. But, gracious heaven! no wonder Dante needed your uncle as a commentator. Truly, the Florentines are a philosophical and deep-thinking people!"

"Dante is not very simple," laughed Lucrezia, "unless you have been brought up on him like I have."

"By the way," asked the friar, "Dante says that the 'Prime Mover'—that is God, isn't it?—that the Prime Mover 'creates a simple soul.' What does he mean by that?"

"You know," replied Lucrezia, "God creates the simple soul, indivisible and everlasting—even God cannot destroy it except by an act of annihilation—and it becomes united to what already exists, forming one compound substance, body and soul; the whole being that single compound individual, man."

"Yes," replied Fra Filippo, doubtfully; for he was neither a philosopher nor a theologian.

"And that is why the human soul, unlike the soul of an animal which springs from matter and perishes with matter, cannot perish at death. It is a simple substance created by God and, therefore, indestructible."

It seems almost incredible that a girl of twenty-two could have reasoned like this. The only argument in its favor being that such of the Quattro-

cento Florentine maidens as had received a philosophical education could and did argue like this.

"H'm!" muttered Fra Filippo. He thought a moment. "Then what happens to the body at death, O philosopher?"

"The body, which is composed of primary matter, as is the stone or flower, is capable of receiving (and being determined by) any appropriate form. Therefore the body, losing the form of the soul by death, becomes transformed, first into the form of a corpse, then into a mass of decay, then into dust. For the soul alone is incorruptible."

"And mother abbess, of what does she now consist?"

"Of primary matter, informed and actuated by a soul which determines the outward appearance of her body."

"She must have a sweet old soul," said Fra Filippo, softly.

"Yes," whispered Lucrezia, "a sweet, dear, loving soul, which has formed a very dear old lady."

"And when she dies, as soon she must?"

"Her soul will go straight to God Who made it, and her body crumble into dust."

"And what of the body of Lucrezia?" he asked, painting quickly, for he had almost got what he wanted.

"Mere primary matter, like the earth and the stones and the trees, with the form and vitality of the soul of Lucrezia. For the soul forms the flesh of the body out of primary matter, whilst of itself it acts as the mind."

"What is your soul like, Lucrezia?" he asked.

Suspecting that he was laughing at her philoso-

phy, the girl made an impudent face at him. "You can see for yourself, messere," she said.

"And Lucrezia de' Buti is?"

"Just primary matter like all the rest of visible nature, informed by the soul of that poor girl. No better than it should be and, I hope, no worse."

Having become incautious through success, the friar raised his voice. "There!" he cried, triumphantly. "Have I painted the soul of mother abbess?"

"Who called mother abbess?" asked the old lady, stirring herself. Then: "I believe I've been asleep."

"And the face of your portrait's finished!" exclaimed Fra Filippo, as Lucrezia helped the abbess to her feet.

II

Of course there was much that was mistaken in the philosophy—especially in the psycho-biology—of the Quattrocento, as the Thomist Philosophers of Louvain will now tell one. For instance, the heart is not the seat of life, capable of bestowing life and embryonic form on the offspring, but merely a muscle. The male principle of life is not the determining factor in the becoming form, but the fusion of the male and female germ-cells. And, although Louvain still holds that the human soul is created and infused into the embryo as soon as the embryonic form has developed into a fitting object for its reception, most of Catholic Christendom now holds that the human soul is created and infused into the parental cells at the time of conception.

At any rate, from now Fra Filippo began to paint the true individuality of his models, which is the soul. His pupil, Botticelli, who came early under

Lucrezia's influence, followed in his footsteps, painting the soul with scarcely a body to hide it. Leonardo da Vinci carried the painting of a soul a step further in the portrait of Madonna Lisa. And Michelangelo carried it to its full perfection, holding that there could not be wrinkles in the human face unless there were the counterpart of wrinkles in the soul.

All these artists were Florentines of the Florentines, and the successors of Fra Filippo. And the Florentines were decidedly what are now called "highbrows." From the noble and lofty foreheads of its ladies, of whom Lucrezia was one—and we can judge from their portraits—the ladies were "highbrows" too.

III

Of course the portrait of mother abbess was not in any way finished, not even the face; for tempora was a slow-painting medium, not in any way resembling the slick medium of oil. The paint in tempora must be applied in little stippling touches, with plenty of cross-hatching. The shadows must be glazed over with transparent pigments mixed with the white of egg. Sometimes an effect may be obtained artificially, as in a rich, red robe for instance, where gold-leaf may be laid on the gesso and paint laid over that. But, in every case, a tempora panel is entirely unlike a painting in fresco, in which the surface is moist plaster and the paint may be applied freely; for, in a tempora panel, the pigment must be laid on the dry, hard, shell-like surface of the gesso in numberless little touches until the result is smooth and even.

"I should think the oil-painting, of which you have been speaking, must be more rapid and easier than painting in tempora," suggested Lucrezia.

"So that," laughed Fra Filippo, "instead of painting cleanly with an exact knowledge of what he is doing, the painter may be able to run one color into another before each is dry?" He paused. "I tell you, Lucrezia, that when oil will be worn and dingy, tempora will be fresh and new; for the egg with which the paint is mixed will form a hard and lasting surface that will endure forever." And, at the present time, when early pictures painted in oil are dingy, the pictures painted by Fra Filippo Lippi in the year 1450 are as fresh and brilliant as they were on the day upon which they were painted. So are those of Fra Filippo's pupils, Botticelli and Filippino, which were painted in tempora. *Tempora mutantur,* the poet says. It doesn't.

IV

Then, as soon as Fra Filippo had finished the abbess's face, he posed the nun who was like her in build for the painting of the habit; and, when that was painted, he started on Santa Margherita. And all through March the mother abbess was often present, sitting in her easy chair and watching Fra Filippo at his painting and Lucrezia at her posing; for the heart and soul of mother abbess were in her picture.

The most delightful thing about mother abbess was the way in which she identified herself with the work, even as though she were a part-creator. "We must get on with Saint Margaret's veil to-day," she

would say; or: "We must finish those hands before the light fades."

Then, as soon as a most lovely and delightful Saint Margaret was finished, Fra Filippo had to complete the drawing of Saint Raphael. Then the painting of Saint Raphael and the boy Tobias had to be undertaken; until, by Easter, Saint Margaret and the abbess were finished on one side of the picture and Saint Raphael and Tobias on the other.

"If the remainder of the picture is as fine as what we have already completed," said mother abbess, "we shall have painted the finest picture in existence."

And all the time, except on one occasion, did Fra Filippo behave with the greatest prudence and discretion—perhaps this was due to the presence of mother abbess, perhaps it was due to his respect for the nun's habit which Lucrezia wore whenever possible, perhaps it was because he was trying to be good to the best of his ability all through that Lent. His one lapse happened when he was painting the face of Saint Margaret.

He and Lucrezia were alone, he painting the face of Saint Margaret, she, unveiled and dressed in a light and pretty gown, posing.

"Since those lips," he said, "are mere primary matter, like the earth and the stones and the trees, there could be no harm if I kissed them." And no one who has seen the sweet and living mouth of the little nun, as she posed for Saint Margaret, can blame the friar too severely.

"Fra Filippo!" cried Lucrezia, horrified.

"It is only what you told me," remarked Fra

Filippo, painting calmly. "It is I who am the true philosopher now."

She rose to the bait as a trout rises to a fly. "But it is I—my soul—that makes the primary matter of my lips actual!" she argued, trembling.

"And what harm can there be in kissing a soul?" asked the friar, smiling.

"Don't be foolish," said Lucrezia, disdaining further argument.

But it was not wise for a priest to talk thus with a young nun; and, although Fra Filippo put the conversation entirely out of his mind, poor Lucrezia could not help thinking of it over and over again. Possibly Adam had more to do with Eve's temptation than the Scripture relates.

V

By Easter Monday Fra Filippo had finished the four Saints—mother abbess may surely be reckoned as a saint, though perhaps not as a very wise one —and now he proposed to paint our Lady of the Girdle.

"If I have finished Saint Margaret and you, mother abbess," he explained, "and also Saint Raphael and Toby, and if I now paint our most gracious Lady, the picture will be practically complete. I can paint Saint Thomas and the two bishops from men models in my own *bottega.*"

Mother abbess agreed. "But had not we better paint the open tomb of our Lady before we go further?" she suggested.

"Excellent!" cried Fra Filippo. "I shall paint

the tomb filled with growing flowers." He turned to Lucrezia. "How do you paint the soul of a flower, sister?"

"I should paint the soul of each flower," replied Lucrezia, "as having a great love for the particular place in which it is accustomed to grow; the water-plants as delighting to grow by the sides of the stream; the gentians as delighting to grow on the slopes of the hills; for, as Dante tells us, 'the plant which is transplanted away from the place that it loves either dies entirely or else leads a sad life.'"

"What flower delights to grow in an empty tomb?" asked Fra Filippo.

"I should think that the rose would delight to grow in the tomb which had held the body of the Mystical Rose," replied Lucrezia.

"Good! I shall paint the tomb as full of growing roses." And, after marking the exact spot where Saint Thomas the Doubter would come, he started on the tomb filled with growing roses.

All the rest of Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday he worked at our Lady's tomb. And, on Thursday, he began the cartoon of our Lady holding the Girdle. Then, on Thursday, mother abbess had the first of the series of attacks of angina pectoris which, in a few months, were to kill her.

Lucrezia called the infirmarian and, together, they helped her to her cell. Then, as in duty bound, Lucrezia told mother prioress who, from that moment, assumed entire control of the whole community, including mother abbess. For the poor mother abbess was so overcome by the agony of that mysterious disease which men call "snake in

the breast" that she could scarcely think connectedly, much less act.

"And how we will get on with our Lady holding the Girdle," sighed Lucrezia as soon as she was free to go back to her task of posing as model, "I do not know; for mother prioress will leave us no rest."

"Quick!" cried Fra Filippo. "Get on to your throne exactly as I first placed you, and we will do as much as possible before the storm breaks."

"The worst of it is," sighed Lucrezia, "that the sisters' nerves are worn so thin by mother prioress that they are near snapping. Mine certainly are; for, although I have tried not to tell you, the prioress has of late girded at me unceasingly."

"I think there must have been a chatterbox as well as a snake in the Garden of Eden," growled Fra Filippo. "Now the snake attacks poor mother abbess, and the chatterbox drives my pretty Eve distracted."

"Poor Eve," whispered Lucrezia. "I hope that Adam will not turn against her."

CHAPTER XII

THE RULE OF MOTHER PRIORESS

I

SINCE the days of Eve, woman has been a difficult problem to handle; for, although a woman will unite herself with a man, entirely maintaining her own individuality, women cannot be trusted to unite with women. The reason seems to be that women are individualists, who do not trust their own sex and, therefore, cannot be trusted to act together.

The Catholic Church has become bitterly conscious of this difficulty and it has taken her many centuries of legislative reform to overcome it; and now, in order to do so, she treats men and women in an entirely different manner. Give a man a position of responsibility, and he may be trusted to live up to it; consequently the head of a religious order of men may be trusted to rule wisely and well. But make a woman the superior of a community of women, and she will tend, especially if she lacks self-confidence, to tyrannize over her subordinates; consequently, with but few exceptions, the head of a community of nuns has now to be elected by her community every three years.

From the moment that the devout and pious mother prioress held the reins of authority, from that moment did she begin to treat her nuns with petty tyranny. When Sister Piera neglected to

clean up her plate as the rules of the convent demanded, not only was she reprimanded for the disregard of her vow of Holy Poverty and warned that such daintiness was most displeasing to Almighty God, but also was she lectured on the same subject every day for a fortnight. When Sister Brigida fell asleep during Matins, not only was she rebuked severely and bidden to rise an hour earlier during the coming week, but also was the whole community given a long address against the sin of laziness with Sister Brigida held up as a sad example. Sister Simona would whisper, asking for this or that, during the silence of dinner: very well, for ten days, Sister Simona must have her dinner alone after the rest of the nuns had finished. And when Sister Spinetta had dared to laugh in the presence of mother prioress, the poor girl had been told to read aloud a long patristic homily against the fault of unruly levity.

All this happened within the first three weeks of mother abbess's illness, and the spirit of rebellion grew by leaps and bounds. Only the novice-mistress and the little novice, safe in the shelter of the novitiate, escaped. As for Sister Lucrezia:

The afternoon of Thursday passed without a storm. Mother prioress was too busy over the abbess to make trouble; but, on Friday, as soon as Lucrezia had begun to pose, seated on her throne and with her pretty hair uncovered—it was beginning to grow out of the shingle and into the bobbed stage now—mother prioress opened the door and entered the painting-room.

Fra Filippo rose politely, careful to show respect for her new-found dignity. "Good morning, mother

prioress," he said. "With mother abbess ill, I expect you find plenty to occupy your time."

The prioress looked at Lucrezia. "Are you one of my nuns?" she asked.

"Yes, reverend mother," replied Lucrezia, smiling a little awkwardly.

"And 'Jezebel painted her face with stibic stone, and adorned her head, and Jehu said: Who is this?'" she quoted.

Poor Lucrezia needed no stibic stone to color her face now. "I am Sister Lucrezia," she murmured feebly.

"Playing the Jezebel?" asked mother prioress.

"Sister Lucrezia is posing for the Madonna of the Girdle by order of the Lady Abbess," broke in Fra Filippo, sharply.

"Not as a Madonna Jezebel, Fra Filippo?" asked the prioress with a suspicious sweetness.

"All this is by order of the abbess!" cried Fra Filippo, furious.

"I am acting for mother abbess now," said the prioress. "And I order that this unseemly foolery shall cease. You, Fra Filippo, ought to have known better than to have suggested it."

"Diavolo!" cried the friar.

"Last time, if I remember right, it was ten thousand fiends, so that is some improvement," she said.

Then she turned to Lucrezia. "Sister," she said softly, "I think that you are more sinned against than sinning. Go to your cell, child, and put on your religious habit. Then come to my room, for I shall have something to say to you presently."

II

As soon as they were alone Fra Filippo turned to the prioress, in a white heat. "Mother abbess ordered that, save for herself, Sister Lucrezia and I should be left alone until I had completed the Madonna della Cintola."

"Since the abbess is unable to act," replied mother prioress, "I am mother abbess."

That seemed a facer, but Fra Filippo still, even in his anger, hoped to reduce her to reason. "Then you intend to stop the painting of the picture?" he asked.

"I intend to stop you from decking out one of my nuns as Jezebel," she answered. "First you paint her as Herodias, at least so Fra Diamante has told me, and now you trick her out as Jezebel —two women of ill-repute! Surely the poor girl is honored!"

"But you have not even seen the picture," cried Fra Filippo in despair. "I tell you that our Lady is most lovely."

"I have seen a Madonna that Fra Angelico painted, dignified and stately. I do not want to see a Madonna that is tricked out like Jezebel."

As always, the prioress had succeeded in reducing Fra Filippo to a state that was bordering on madness, and now he was distinctly rude. "Last time I met you," he said, "you harped on Fra Angelico; now it is all Jezebel with allusions to Fra Angelico. Truly you are a woman of but one idea!"

"That is not the way to speak to an abbess," she reminded him.

"You are not an abbess, mother prioress, nor

ever will be," he answered. "Now about the picture," he continued. "I had an order from the real abbess to finish our Lady of the Girdle with Sister Lucrezia as the Madonna."

"And I cancel the order. Sister Lucrezia shall not sit to a man with your reputation, nor do I desire you to frequent my convent except to perform your duty of saying Mass."

"My reputation?" repeated Fra Filippo, dumbfounded.

"I have heard from a nun in Florence, who is a niece of the vicar general, and I now know of your reputation in Florence."

"Good God!" cried Fra Filippo. This was indeed a bolt from the blue.

"Ah! That is better than ten thousand fiends, Fra Filippo."

And, having routed her old enemy by means of her new-found authority, the prioress left the room. For to such a pass may a deeply pious woman, who is dressed in a brief authority, come that there is no holding her. Besides, the fact that mother prioress had seized the authority that in reality belonged to the abbess makes one suspect that, deep down in her soul, she had secretly nurtured the deadly sin of pride.

As for Fra Filippo, he packed up his traps and departed from the Convent of Santa Margherita, leaving his masterpiece unfinished.

Afterwards it was finished, and ruined, by Fra Diamante.

III

Lucrezia, pale as death and furious with rage, went to her cell and put on her habit. Then she

went down to the abbess's room to await mother prioress.

The personal insult had made her angry; the insults to Fra Filippo had made her more angry; and the implied insult to the pair of them had made her simply furious. And now the primary matter, actuated by her soul, which made her face, needed no stibic stone to make it crimson.

She waited five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. Then the door opened and Lucrezia stood up.

"I am sorry you should have been betrayed into such an unenviable position, sister," began the prioress. "Truly the late abbess must have been failing in her mind for the last six months, and you are in no way to blame."

Lucrezia was silent.

"To allow so young a nun to discard her habit and to pose as an artist's model to a disreputable friar and a painter of no skill, is to put temptation in her way that no sane abbess would have dreamed of."

Lucrezia still kept silence.

"Girl, you have not lost your honor, have you?"

"Not through Fra Filippo!" cried Lucrezia.

"That is well, for Fra Filippo is a disreputable man and a hanger-on of the dissolute Medici."

"I have lived all my days in Florence," cried Lucrezia, "and the Medici have always been respected and Godfearing people."

"You dare to contradict me, sister? Truly this community needs ruling with a firm hand."

"And as for Fra Filippo," cried Lucrezia, unable to contain herself any longer, "I have posed for Fra Filippo for more than two months past, often

being alone with him, and he has said no unbecoming word to me and done no unbecoming act."

Smiling, the prioress quoted an Italian proverb to the effect that who excuses accuses herself. "Are you sure that he has said nothing unbecoming?" she asked.

The memory of Fra Filippo's unfortunate jest about kissing her lips flashed into her mind and Lucrezia, being a truthful girl, could make no reply.

"Now listen while I tell you of Fra Filippo's character," said the prioress. And she drew a vivid picture of the friar's character as seen from the view-angle of the niece of the vicar general, and very lurid she made it. "And you will see that the man is not only a thief and a forger, who confessed his crimes when the rack made him do so," she ended, "but also a cripple who has been ruptured under torture."

"I don't believe it," said Lucrezia, doggedly.

The prioress let this impertinence pass, and began a lecture on the process of seduction. "For," said she, "even a friar may seduce, even a nun may yield to seduction." The lecture embraced such vital points as *The Beginning of Seduction,* the man starting with the seduction of the woman's vanity by leading her to wear garments that were unbecoming to her state and position. "And, when Fra Filippo induced you, a nun, to discard your habit and to appear with your hair (such as there is) uncovered, and yourself tricked out in the garments of a light woman, he had already achieved the first stage in your seduction." Then came *The Suggestion of Light Thoughts,* Herodias and Jezebel for instance.

"But you, mother prioress," broke in Lucrezia, "yourself suggested Jezebel, not Fra Filippo."

Once again the wise prioress let this pass, and went on with her lecture on seduction, describing much that was obvious, much that was distinctly original and much that was absolutely incredible. Man was indeed a crafty being, and woman a foolish dupe, though why such a crafty being should expend so much skill and energy on the undoing of such a silly creature she did not say. As she warmed up to her subject, she dilated with all the Italian love of the natural processes and all the fifteenth-century coarseness, until Lucrezia's cheeks grew far redder than any stibic stone could have made them.

"Now that you know all about it, child," she ended, "you can be on your guard."

"Do seducers often visit convents?" asked Lucrezia, amazed.

"God forbid!" replied mother prioress, piously. "And now," she added, "say the seven penitential psalms for any sins you have committed, three Magnificats as a thanksgiving to our Lady who has saved you, and three De Profundi for the soul of Fra Filippo. Say all these every day for a month."

And, having done as much harm as she could, suggesting as many dangerous thoughts in the course of half an hour as the most finished seducer might have suggested in a whole month, the prioress told Lucrezia to retire to her cell in order to meditate upon what she had said.

IV

That night, as with burning cheeks Lucrezia thought over the lecture, she felt sick and disgusted. And when she awoke at daybreak she got out a sheet of paper, and she wrote:

"Dear Friend,

Mother prioress has been saying terrible things against you and me. She says that, by persuading me to uncover my head and don gay apparel, you have been attempting to ruin me; in fact that you have already led me astray through my vanity. And she said many things that were worse. And, worse than all the rest, she said vile things against your character.

You are never to come to the Convent of Santa Margherita again except to say Mass, and I shall never see my dearest friend again, and the picture will never be finished.

Your devoted and distracted,

LUCREZIA."

She read through the letter. "If ever I should fall through love," she murmured, furious, "I should give myself for love, and not wait to be seduced!" Which was a terrible thing for a young nun to say. But there is a method of suggesting evil thoughts through warnings and lecturings which is infinitely more dangerous than direct suggestion, and, of this indirect method, mother prioress was a past mistress.

Lucrezia sealed this letter and directed it to Fra Filippo, resolving to hand it to Spinetta, who would hand it to the Sister Cellaress, who would hand it to the woman that brought the milk, who would hand it to Fra Filippo's housekeeper.

CHAPTER XIII

ON BREAKING ENCLOSURE

I

I SPEAK of honest religious, not of hypocrites; but, fortunately, hypocrites are rare in the religious life.

The monk and the nun have a precisely similar vocation, which is to serve God, and God alone, in a life of personal chastity, personal poverty, and personal obedience to the lawful superior; but there the likeness ends. For, with the man, the monk or the friar lives in what may be called a spiritual enclosure which he must keep inviolate, going off on his various duties for days or weeks at a time, mixing with the world, and yet keeping intact his spiritual enclosure of chastity, poverty and obedience; whereas the nun, except in such callings as that of nursing sister or sister of charity, is not called off into the world and, therefore, must not subject herself to the tempting influence of friends and relations, to the dangerous allurements of the world, or to the possible advances of lovers. Therefore the nun remains within the convent enclosure.

In these days, God knows, it is difficult enough for a girl to become a nun. Two years' apprenticeship and novitate before she is allowed to make any vows, during which time she can leave the convent and return home at any moment. And, during those two years, she is closely watched by her novice-

mistress and superior as to her vocation, and she has to be elected into the community before she is allowed to make her vows. I should think that quite seventy-five per cent of novices fail during these two years, and return to the world wiser and (I hope) better women.

Then three years follow as a professed novice, so that the nun may test her vocation, before the girl can take the final vows which are for life.

When once a nun has taken her final vows, she cannot return to the world unless she gets a dispensation from Rome; but this dispensation is not unreasonably withheld, and I know of maiden ladies, living in their own homes, who have been nuns for ten or twenty years.

But, in the year 1426—that is to say before the Council of Trent—there was no such strict enclosure for the nun. Nuns were allowed to receive visitors to almost any extent, and to visit friends without the convent walls whenever they could get permission. So the enclosure of the Convent of Santa Margherita was to keep men out, not to keep nuns in; and any nun who had received leave could go home to see her friends.

II

Sister Lucrezia had no friends except her married brother, and her sister-in-law did not want to have her home. But Sister Piera di Vanni Sensi, Sister Simona di Michele Lottieri, and Sister Brigida d'Antonio Peruzzi, like most of the Augustinian nuns, were of good families, and had friends and relations in Prato who would welcome them

warmly. Also, if Lucrezia were once outside, Spinetta could go to her.

You may believe that the rebellious nuns talked all this over amongst themselves and discussed it from all points of the compass. If Lucrezia left the convent that would be breaking enclosure; but, if she did, and at the end of a few days Spinetta joined her, that would not be breaking enclosure to the same extent; and, if the three other nuns went home and stopped there, that would not be breaking enclosure to any appreciable degree.

As soon as they could stand mother prioress no longer, Sister Piera, Sister Simona, and Sister Brigida resolved to go home in a few days, with or without leave, and stay there.

But towards the end of April, Lucrezia could suffer mother prioress no more. So, in the solitude of her cell, she got pen and paper and wrote:—

"Dearest friend,

I can stand this life no longer. Mother prioress regards me as an Abandoned Woman, and nags at me incessantly, throwing my friendship for you in my face.

I trust you to find a place for me until I can go to my brother, and I know that I do not trust in vain.

On the First of May we all go to the veneration of the Girdle at the *pieve,* and shall walk two and two, mother prioress coming last. So, if you can hold mother prioress in conversation for a minute, I will slip away and hide myself in the crowd. Then I will go where you bid me.

Your devoted

LUCREZIA."

Then she sealed the letter and despatched it through the cellaress as before.

III

Now I am afraid that, since he had left the Carmine and gone out into Florence, Fra Filippo had not kept his spiritual enclosure in good repair. Fra Angelico had kept his enclosure intact; but Fra Filippo must have broken down the wall of holy poverty by self-indulgence, the wall of perfect obedience by his impatience to discipline, and probably, though we know nothing for certain, he had damaged the wall of chastity, thus leaving his soul open to all sorts of enemies. And, although he had tried to restore this triple wall during Lent, the rebound of Easter had made the foundations very tottering. So, when he received Lucrezia's note, he became all fuss and uncertainty.

"The devil take the girl!" he muttered on his first impulse. Then, because he had grown very fond of Lucrezia during the past two months, he muttered: "God bless the girl! What in the name of wonder can I do with her?"

He thought of writing to her brother, but that would be a breach of confidence; he thought of taking a couple of rooms for her, but that would be a certain cause of scandal. Then an idea flashed into his mind, and he went to his house in the Via delle Tre Gore.

Now Maddalena had been married the past two months and was as full of gratitude as an egg is full of meat. She had let several of the rooms, started a vegetable shop on the ground floor, and her husband was already sufficiently recovered to be working in Fra Filippo's garden, busy growing choice vegetables. So the friar went to Maddalena

in his trouble, for he often went to see the couple now.

A young lady, he explained, was coming to Prato to see her sister who was in the Convent of Santa Margherita.

"That is very wise, padre," said Maddalena. "For the good nuns must see their friends."

Could the lady have a couple of rooms?

"Indeed she could," replied Maddalena. "Nice rooms into which the sun shines. And I could cook for her, padre, and wait on her, and make her comfortable." She paused. "When will she be coming?" she asked.

"On the first of May."

"Very well, padre," cried Maddalena, "I shall be ready. You can depend on me for that."

So that was arranged for, nobody being a penny the wiser, not even Maddalena.

To say that Fra Filippo was excited is to understate the case; for he had become fonder of Lucrezia during the last two months than was either wise or right, and he had thought that he would never see her again; and now that he was to see her so soon, the thought of seeing her filled him with delight. She could chatter to him about Dante or anything she liked, and she would understand his art and help him in his ideals. Of the ultimate result he did not pause to think, for that was not his custom; but, for the present, and he lived chiefly in the present, he could come to see her as safely as he could come to see Maddalena.

IV

Fra Filippo was now forty-nine, and Victorian writers like Mr. Strutt have jested about the old man of forty-nine having a romantic attachment towards a girl of twenty-two. "They thought that so plain a man, already fifty years of age, and old enough to be Lucrezia's father, could not possibly be suspected of harboring, much less of exciting, a tender passion," says Mr. Strutt. Unfortunately Mr. Strutt has mistaken the portrait of Mgr. Canon Maringhi, who was well on in years, for the portrait of Fra Filippo, and as for the rest— Rubbish!

The Victorians, with their sedentary life and port wine, might have been old at forty; but a man with a face like that of the real Fra Filippo would be young and capable of inspiring affection for many years longer. Why, I myself have known many men who enlisted as privates or joined as second lieutenants in the recent war when they were as old as or older than Fra Filippo, and they came through those fearful years worn but full of courage, and some of them fell in love, and married, and settled down happily at over fifty.

Well, that comparatively young man, Fra Filippo —and I knew many Fra Filippos during the war— was not happily married, and he had never been friendly with a girl who was worth his friendship, and he ought to have been safe in his spiritual enclosure, and, for him, the friendship was not a safe one.

Have a look at Lucrezia's face, and ask yourself whether she would be a safe platonic friend. Before you had known her a month you would be head

and ears in love with her. Besides, both Fra Filippo and Lucrezia were Italians, a people who cannot play with love without the danger of catching fire. And, besides, Lucrezia was the fair type of Italian which is the most dangerous type of all.

No, the friendship could not in any way be called a safe one. And, as Lucrezia was to live in Fra Filippo's house and receive him privately, the situation simply bristled with danger.

So, when he wrote, through Sister Cellaress, telling Sister Lucrezia to come to his house in the Via delle Tre Gore, it was bad. And, when he received an answer that she would dress in the gown which she had worn when posing for the Madonna, throwing off her cloak and veil as soon as she was clear of mother prioress, it was worse.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST OF MAY

I

NOW, on Christmas Day, Easter Day, the First Day of May, and on the Feasts of the Assumption and Birth of our Lady, our Lady's Girdle was exposed for public veneration from the outdoor pulpit of the *pieve*. And this was the first of May.

As the nuns of Santa Margherita entered the Square of the Pieve to take part in the veneration of the relic, Fra Filippo, true to his promise, approached the mother prioress.

"Will you reconsider your decision, mother prioress?" he said. "I ask you, in the presence of the holy relic, to continue the privilege which the abbess granted me and to allow me to complete, unhindered, my picture of Madonna della Cintola."

Startled by this abrupt challenge, the prioress sought for words. Then: "The soul of Sister Lucrezia," she replied, stiffly, "is of more importance than a picture."

"There is no hope of your changing your mind?"

"Absolutely none. I am in the position of abbess, and I shall do my duty—I shall do my duty more strictly than my predecessor." And she looked at him as though he were the evil one in the garb of a friar.

Fra Filippo looked at the place where Sister

Lucrezia had stood, and found that she had vanished; a moment ago she had been standing beside Sister Spinetta at the head of the nuns' procession, and now her place was vacant. Then the crowd surged forward towards the pulpit, and immediately the nuns were swept to and fro, each one of them struggling to get the best place that she could secure.

Fra Filippo laughed to himself at the simplicity and ingenuity of Lucrezia's scheme.

II

The moment that Lucrezia found herself clear of the procession, she began to move towards the edge of the crowd, and each following moment made her progress easier. For the people were pressing towards the *pieve* and all she had to do was to keep her position and the crowd did the rest. Then, as the crowd grew thin, she edged away unnoticed; for every one was busy gazing towards the pulpit which was on the façade of the church and no one had eyes for a solitary nun.

Then Lucrezia began to move quickly. She did not run, but she moved quickly. She found a house door open—the inmates were away with the *pieve* crowd—and, slipping in, she threw off her veil and mantle and placed a lace mantilla on her head, and there she stood, no longer a nun, but just an ordinary woman, blue dress, lace mantilla, like hundreds amongst the crowd. Folding the cloak and veil into a neat parcel, she set out for Fra Filippo's house.

Maddalena was standing at the window watch-

ing for her, and, as soon as she saw the solitary lady approaching the house—it was only a step from the Square of the Pieve—she hurried to the door to meet her.

"This is Madonna— The lady of whom Fra Filippo told me?" she asked.

"Madonna di Francesco," said Lucrezia, wisely giving her father's name instead of her surname.

"Ah! Madonna di Francesco. Isn't Fra Filippo an angel?"

"He is very good and very kind," said Lucrezia, cautiously.

"He is a veritable angel!" cried Maddalena, and she began to pour out an account of all that Fra Filippo had done for her. But, quickly, her training as a serving-maid came back to her and she pulled herself together. "There," she cried, "I am allowing my foolish tongue to run away with me, and, although I cannot see any stains, madonna would like to remove the stains of travel." And she led her visitor up the stairs and into the bedroom.

This was a delightful bedroom, large and facing the southeast, and furnished in the simple yet tasteful manner that Maddalena's care and Fra Filippo's artistic mind had suggested.

"I will bring Madonna di Francesco some hot water," said Maddalena. Then her admiration carried her away. "Madonna, how lovely you are!" she cried.

Lucrezia smiled sadly, for what was the value of beauty to her?

As soon as she was alone, the little nun went to the polished mirror that Fra Filippo had thoughtfully provided—it was the mirror which

the friar used to reverse his subjects when required for his pictures—for she had not seen a mirror since she had become a nun. She saw a girl with the most delicate and attractive features that can well be imagined, crowned with a crop of fine golden hair.

"Madonna! Since I have been at Santa Margherita I have grown lovely," she murmured, and again sighed.

Then she examined her dress, which was somewhat warm and heavy for the time of year, and quickly changed it for the gown of Saint Margaret which she had brought with her. For these two dresses, the gown of our Lady of the Girdle and the gown of Saint Margaret, made by mother abbess and her nuns for the picture of the Madonna della Cintola, would never be wanted again and were the property of Lucrezia as much as of any one.

She looked again in the mirror and, astonished at her good looks, smiled a little to herself. Then she went to the door and called Maddalena.

"Maddalena," she called, "I want you."

Maddalena came hurrying up the stairs.

"Has the man brought my baggage?" asked Lucrezia, knowing that there was no baggage to be brought.

"No, madonna," answered Maddalena; "but if I can lend you anything, I shall be proud."

"Have you a brush and comb?"

"I have a new brush and comb that my sister gave me at my wedding." And she hurried off to fetch them.

"Now, madonna," said Maddalena, "let me brush your hair, for I was maid to Madonna Clarice

Bovacchiesi before I was waiting-maid at the Inn of the Girdle."

Lucrezia seated herself, feeling that all this was extraordinarily unreal, and Maddalena removed her mantilla.

"Madonna has doubtless had a fever?" she asked, thus accounting for the shortness of the hair.

"Perhaps madonna is recovering from a fever," said Lucrezia; for the last few days in the convent had been distinctly hectic and feverish.

"Now, if I do your hair thus," suggested Maddalena, "it will look quite natural."

And, after curling the ends of the hair round a poker which she had heated in the fire, she began to brush skilfully; and, as she brushed, she began to pour out the history of the friar's great kindness to her.

"There," she cried, "the effect of the hair, brushed like this, is most entrancing. Madonna is like a little serving-boy at High Mass on a festa. Tut! I should fall wildly in love with such a boy."

Then an impulse that was altogether mad, and in its madness altogether wise, moved the girl. Unless she told something of herself, she foresaw that she would be involved in a whole tissue of lies.

"Maddalena," she said, "Fra Filippo has spoken often of you. If I tell you the truth, can I trust you to keep silence?"

"By our Lady and all the Saints, you can trust me to the death, madonna."

And, beginning at the beginning, Lucrezia told the carefully edited story of her posing for our Lady of the Girdle, and of her flight from the Convent of Santa Margherita. Mercifully Maddalena

was not struck with the sinfulness of the whole proceeding, nor with its danger, but only with its romance.

"It is like one of the *novella* that Madonna Clarice Bovacchiesi delighted in, and which I used to read to her before she went to bed," she cried.

Lucrezia felt relieved.

"And do you love Fra Filippo?" asked Maddalena, full of the *novella* theory, her eyes sparkling. Indeed, in the *novella* of Messer Boccaccio, love ran rampant, neither sparing priests nor monks nor friars.

"Fie! For shame!" cried Lucrezia, growing crimson as she recalled the lurid warnings of the prioress.

"I should love him if I were you!"

"For shame, Maddalena!"

"If I had not been a serving-maid, I should have fallen in love with him when I was at the Inn of the Girdle, since he is one who inspires love."

"You must not talk like this," chided Lucrezia.

"I am all discretion," said Maddalena. "Besides I love you dearly, Madonna di Francesco."

The maid's tongue kept silence, but her mind ran on; for, although she was sane and balanced in most of her actions, she had a most romantic imagination. Her much loved Fra Filippo should fall in love with this delightful little lady, and the Medici should come riding by to meet His Holiness the Pope, and the Medici should see Fra Filippo and Madonna di Francesco in deep trouble, and he should say: "Cannot you trust Cosimo de' Medici to right a wrong?" (This part did not come out of Boccaccio but out of one of the more recent

novelists.) And at that moment the Pope should ride up, and he should dispense Fra Filippo and madonna from their vows, and all should end happily. Altogether it was the wildest day-dream that ever came into the mind of a romantic serving-girl.

Then, Lucrezia's toilet having been finished, Maddalena led her into the sitting-room, which was large and sunny and simply furnished in the most excellent taste.

The crowd was beginning to move away from the *pieve*.

"There," said Maddalena, "the ceremony is finished, and we may expect to see Fra Filippo at any moment now." And she left the room, closing the door behind her.

And Lucrezia stood by the window, overcome by the consciousness of her good looks on the one hand and, on the other hand, by the awful thing that she had done in leaving the convent and in thrusting herself on the protection of poor Fra Filippo.

III

When Fra Filippo had seen Lucrezia vanish, he had pressed forward into the crowd. His name must not be coupled with that of Lucrezia, nor must his absence be linked with her disappearance.

"It was in the year 1096, when Pope Urban had moved Christendom to rescue the places made holy by the footsteps of the Son of God from the pollution of the infidel, that a young lad of Prato, Michele by name, set out to follow in the wake of the great army." A Dominican was preaching

from the pulpit outside the *pieve*, and Fra Filippo could not help listening to what he was saying.

"And this young lad, who had set out in faith, was moved by hope to follow on bravely through all the hardships of the desert. And, one evening, as he rested by a well in the desert, a little daughter of a great priest came to minister to him. And, moved by love, he kissed the little maid; and she, moved by a still greater love, gave him the most precious Girdle which our Lady had worn. And he brought this most precious relic home to Prato, and it is the relic that will now be exposed for our veneration."

Fra Filippo's attention wandered to himself; for had not he started to paint the Madonna, long ago, moved by an ardent faith; and had he not struggled on inspired by hope; and was he not reaching his ideal through the love of a sweet maiden?

Then the veneration of the relic followed; and Fra Filippo, who had no great belief in its authenticity, found the ceremonies very wearisome.

At last all was over and, placing himself where mother prioress must pass him, Fra Filippo greeted her respectfully as she passed close to him, drawing her cold acknowledgment in response. Then, a load off his mind, he took himself to the house in the Via delle Tre Gore.

How would he find Lucrezia? Would he find her a woeful little person, full of tears; or would he find her obsessed with the cruelties which she had borne? He almost dreaded to meet her.

He entered the house, and Maddalena greeted him at the door.

"Madonna Lucrezia di Francesco has arrived,

padre," she said, "and a sweeter or lovelier little lady was never born."

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In the front sitting-room," she answered. And she thought: "If poor Fra Filippo does not meet with a temptation that is far more dangerous than any which Sant' Antonio experienced, I know nothing of men."

IV

Now Lucrezia's face, as her portraits tell us, was full of sex, which merely means that she was a womanly woman and therefore full of sweetness and tenderness. For, when the gift of sex is developed on the lower natural side, the woman may become the mistress of many men; and, when the gift of sex is developed on the higher natural side, the woman becomes the loving and adored wife of one man and the devoted mother of his children; but, when the gift of sex is developed by the supernatural gift that is given to most women, the love that is normally bestowed on the male is transformed and subliminated into the love of God.

Possibly, in the first instance, Lucrezia might have possessed the supernatural gift of a true vocation; but, of late, partly through the unwise permission which mother abbess had given her to pose for Fra Filippo, and more especially through the stupid and heartless treatment of mother prioress, the supernatural grace of a true vocation seemed to have vanished, which had left the girl with the possibility of becoming a loving and single-hearted wife, and this, by her vow of celibacy, was impossible.

Anyhow Lucrezia had the gift of sex strongly

developed, and she was as far removed from the sexless or hard woman, such as mother prioress, as Tuscany is removed from Berlin.

V

Now Lucrezia's face, as we have just said, was full of sex, and when this was combined with a cropped head of a golden-haired serving-boy the effect was bewitching.

As she stood to welcome Fra Filippo, her supple form clothed in the gown of Saint Margaret and her charming head capped by her bobbed hair, he thought that she was the most lovely and graceful being in the whole world.

"Lucrezia!" he cried.

The girl was trembling, but she came forward to meet the friar bravely and with dignity.

"Fra Filippo," she said, "now that I have recovered from my brief madness, I can see what a terrible thing I have done. For, not only is my sin of breaking enclosure terrible, but the difficulty in which I have placed you is still more terrible."

"Eh?" he asked. "They will say that I abducted you, I suppose?" And he smiled cheerfully.

"Yes," replied Lucrezia, blushing.

"But who is to know?" cried the friar, letting his eyes take in the whole of this pretty girl.

"What do you mean?" she asked, all of a twitter to know his meaning.

"Who is to recognize my little Lady, all fair and dainty, as she who was a Canoness of Saint Augustine?"

"Oh!" said Lucrezia, for this had not struck her.

"Mother prioress might recognize you, but she never leaves the convent; the abbess might recognize you, but she is ill in bed. If the other four nuns who, as you told me, are planning to leave the convent, should happen to see you, they will take care not to recognize you. The woman who brings in the milk is too stupid to recognize you, and Ser Piero d' Antonio is too blind."

"There is the milk-woman's little son who posed as Tobias. He is a sharp lad when he has not the stomach-ache, and he will recognize me."

"And I will undoubtedly get him a job as grinder of pigments in some Florentine *bottega*."

"So you think I am safe?"

"As long as you don't pass the Convent of Santa Margherita. You can go into the market with Maddalena. You can go into the *pieve*. As soon as Spinetta joins you, you can go for walks into the country with her, and none will recognize you."

"Thank God!" murmured Lucrezia.

"And now it would be wise if I went home to dine with Fra Diamante," said the friar, "and this evening I shall sup at the Inn of the Girdle so that all may notice me. I shall see you no more until to-morrow."

"And I shall say the little Offices and Vespers, and to-morrow I shall go to Mass at the *pieve*."

"And you will not be dull, little one?" asked Fra Filippo.

"When I can look out of the window, padre? It is plain that you have not been four years in a convent. Besides there is always Maddalena to talk with."

"Well, I had best be going," sighed Fra Filippo.

Lucrezia thrust her hands into his, impulsively. "And I can never thank you enough for what you have done," she cried. "And I am so very, very sorry for all the trouble I have caused you."

"And," said Fra Filippo, "I am in the seventh heaven at the thought of having you here; for, when I thought that I should see my little Lady no more, I was desolate."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE VIA DELLE TRE GORE

I

THE cessation of the painting of the Madonna della Cintola gave Fra Filippo plenty of spare time, and so the next morning he went to visit Lucrezia, and the next morning after that, and every single morning after that; and the more the girl grew to know him, the more delightful did he appear, and the less did she regard him as a religious or even as a priest. He was not clever at philosophy nor at poetry nor at the classics; but he was brilliantly clever at the kindred art of painting, and his knowledge of all kinds of men, from the literati who frequented the Casa Medici to the journeymen artists who filled the *bottega* of Florence, was most entertaining and instructive.

Quickly and spontaneously Lucrezia became the very heart's friend of Fra Filippo; then, without knowing it, she slipped into love. Very delicate and ethereal this love was; never, at the start, bruising the petals of her innocence: then, gradually, it became a little warmer.

As for Fra Filippo, the beauty of the girl filled his artistic eye, her gracefulness pleased his artistic senses, her keen intelligence satisfied his mind, and herself filled the whole of his soul.

II

Since the following incidents could never have happened with a third person in the room, they must have taken place before Spinetta joined her sister.

Lucrezia had long wished to renew her close acquaintance with the *Divine Comedy,* and a couple of days before this Fra Filippo had succeeded in borrowing a copy of the *Inferno* from the *proposto* and had brought the book to her.

They were sitting together, Filippo and Lucrezia, before the fireplace upon which Maddalena, in response to Fra Filippo's instructions, had kept a few logs smoldering. The girl's eyes were alight with the enjoyment of the poetry, and she was talking eagerly. So bewitching did she look and so alluring was her earnestness that instinctively Fra Filippo's arm went round her and, drawing her unresisting form close to him, he kissed her.

She drew back quickly.

"You must not do that!" she said, in a tense voice.

"I am sorry," he answered, conscience-stricken. "I am indeed sorry!"

"See here, Filippo," she said, desperately in earnest, "we must face this matter once and for all; for I am very weak, and I am growing to care for you very dearly and, when a maiden cares for a man like that—" She paused, at a loss for a word. "My soul is in your hands, Filippo!" she cried.

"I am sorry," he murmured, his conscience really moved.

"Stay!" she said, picking up the *Inferno.* "I was

reading of a case like ours only last night." And she turned over the pages until she came to the end of the Fifth Canto.

"Dante had met Francesca da Rimini in the Second Circle of Hell, and he asked her how she came to sin with her brother-in-law, Paolo Malatesta, and she answered— But I had best read her answer in Dante's own words, and remember that it is Francesca who is speaking:—

" 'One day, when we were reading of the charm
Of Launcelot, and how love did him entice;
Alone we were without a thought of harm.
Our eyes together drew, not once nor twice
During the reading, pale our close-placed cheeks,
But one point overcame us in a trice.
When of Sir Launcelot's smile the writer speaks—
The smile which came of such a love's enhancing—
Paolo, whom my spirit ever seeks,
Kissed me upon my parted lips entrancing.
Such was the book that Galeotto wrote.
That day no more of Galeotto's romancing.' "

She looked straight at him. "If a kiss, given by Paolo and permitted by Francesca, was the beginning of their downfall, we must be very careful in our friendship, Filippo."

"I am sorry, my Lady," murmured Fra Filippo.

Then, gradually, the tension eased down, and presently he asked her concerning this Launcelot.

"My uncle told me that he was a noble Cavaliero of the Court of King Arthur, who sinned with his Lord's wife, Queen Guinevere, and the Cavaliero Galeotto wrote their sad story." By the "Cavaliero Galeotto" Lucrezia meant Sir Galahad, who was supposed to have written the tragic *Romance of Launcelot of the Lake.*

An hour later Fra Filippo made ready to go. "I am very sorry for what has happened, little one," he said. "It shall not happen again."

But, before many days had passed, it did happen again and, this time, Lucrezia was not so distressed. Then the other four nuns left the convent, and Spinetta came to live with Lucrezia.

If on this occasion of the first kiss Lucrezia's conduct was splendid and Fra Filippo's behavior deserving of censure, it must be remembered that Lucrezia's virtue was still stainless whilst Fra Filippo most likely, as the saying is, had been there before.

III

Sister Piera di Vanni Sensi, Sister Simona di Michele Lottieri, Sister Brigida d' Antonio Peruzzi and Sister Spinetta de' Buti could endure mother prioress no longer. Of course Lucrezia's disappearance had caused a great commotion; but, since no one could say aught about her or even discover in what way she had disappeared, there was nothing to be said except the wildest guess-work.

Then Sister Piera, Sister Simona, Sister Brigida and Sister Spinetta silently packed such possessions as remained to them and quietly left the convent. There was no one to hinder them, Mother Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi being in the novitiate, mother abbess being in bed, and mother prioress being, for once in her life, struck speechless in the hall.

"Where are you going, Spinetta dear?" asked Sister Piera as they left the convent.

"To my sister, Lucrezia," answered Spinetta.

"Then you know where she is?"

"I have known all the time; but a secret that is locked up in one's own breast remains a secret."

"Well, you must come and see me when I have broken the terrible news to my family," laughed Sister Piera.

"And you must certainly come and see me too," said Sister Simona. "For I shall be received with veal like the prodigal son."

But Sister Brigida d' Antonio Peruzzi, having come of a family of fourteen and being none too sure of her welcome, could not invite Spinetta to visit her.

IV

Then Spinetta and Lucrezia settled down together in the house that was in the Via delle Tre Gore, and were as happy as they could be under the circumstances, attending Mass every morning at the *pieve* and saying the Divine Office together. Sometimes they went shopping with Maddalena, sometimes they went for long walks into the country together. As for money, since Lucrezia's brother would not receive his sisters in the old home in Florence—Lucrezia always thought that it was his wife who had raised the objection—Fra Filippo said that he was making much money and would be delighted to entertain them, defraying all costs, for eternity. Except in his direst straits, Fra Filippo's estimate of his present and future financial position was always optimistic.

"But we cannot come on you like this, padre!" protested Lucrezia.

"Your brother paid fifty florins each as your dowry," laughed Fra Filippo, "and I am making a hundred florins for a single picture. Besides, how

much cheaper are you two than a wife, who would spend all my money and worry me to death into the bargain."

Fra Filippo and Lucrezia seemed to have drifted into a thoroughly reputable and well conducted friendship; but, under this open friendship, the fire of love burnt with an ever increasing ardor. At the time of his quarrel with mother prioress, the friar had arranged that Fra Diamante should say Mass at the Convent of Santa Margherita; and, as the summer drew on, he moved into the house in the Via delle Tre Gore and turned his house in the Piazza del Mercatale into a workshop where any chance commissions might be executed by Diamante and his two assistants. Then, towards the end of September, Maddalena's baby was born.

The birth of Maddalena's baby produced a far-reaching result. Maddalena was hard put to it to cook for her guests, keep the house clean and tidy and attend to the vegetable shop; and Spinetta, who had a great love for babies, devoted herself to the new-come infant. And, because of this, Lucrezia was left far too much alone with Fra Filippo.

Who can say how the sin first arose? Certainly it would be unjust to accuse Fra Filippo, who was essentially a normal man. For, contrary to the popular idea, the normal man is no more a seducer than the normal woman is a female vampire. The two loved each other with an ever-growing love; human nature is strong, especially in sunny Italy, and propinquity and opportunity are fruitful occasions of sin. Anyhow, before the end of December, Lucrezia gave up saying her Office and Fra Filippo left off saying his Mass.

V

It was early in February when Lucrezia's fear became a certainty and, with pale cheeks and dry lips, the girl told her lover that in less than eight months she expected to become a mother.

"Before God," cried Fra Filippo, "as long as my life lasts, I will love and care for you, Lucrezia, and for you alone."

"What is the use?" asked Lucrezia, hopelessly. "Our vows forbid us to marry."

"At least you will promise as I have done," cried the friar, his face almost as colorless as hers.

"How can I do aught else?" asked Lucrezia, sadly. "A woman who loves as I love you, my Filippo, can love but once."

Then in the deadly peril of discovery they laid their heads together so that they might decide what could be done. For, in spite of what modern writers say of the immorality of the Renaissance, a scandal such as that of Fra Filippo and Lucrezia would ruin the guilty couple, at least in Florence or Prato. Who amongst the ecclesiastical patrons of Fra Filippo would employ him? Who, even amongst his private patrons, dare give him work? Besides, there was the council of magistrates which regulated the behavior of the religious in Prato to be considered, and this council wielded great authority. So, finally, the lovers decided to call the trusty Maddalena into the conference, and to put off telling poor Spinetta as long as might be.

Maddalena, with her unholy imagination, was frankly pagan about the matter. Who could resist the necessity of love when a great love came? She

herself had been a victim as they well knew. No one meant any harm; but love came and drove folks crazy.

"But how can we keep the matter secret?" asked Fra Filippo, who had a great respect for Maddalena's capability.

This was Fra Filippo's house—every one knew that—and nothing could be more natural than that he should lodge in his own house. No one knew that he was acquainted with the two ladies, who came to lodge there before he did and, if he was careful to absent himself from Prato when the bambino arrived, no one would suspect anything.

"But what about the bambino's arrival?" asked Fra Filippo.

Maddalena assumed an air of wisdom; for all this plotting and planning was exactly like one of Messer Boccaccio's *novella* and she was in her element. "I shall be here to look after Madonna Lucrezia," she said, "and, as I have always kept things to myself, no one knows aught about my lodgers. The tradesmen know that Madonna di Francesco and her sister are good customers who pay promptly; but, because they pay ready money, none will remember when they first came. Madonna may have a husband who is in foreign parts, or madonna's infant may be the result of an unfortunate love affair—such things do happen. Madonna pays her way, and no one troubles."

"It will certainly be wise if I go away at the time of the bambino's arrival," said Fra Filippo, thoughtfully.

"Filippo!" cried Lucrezia, her voice full of reproach.

Fra Filippo placed his hand on hers, pressing it tenderly. "It is for the sake of your good name that I go, my loved one," he said.

"Heaven!" cried Maddalena. "That is what I call love!" And, perhaps, she was not far wrong.

VI

Soon after they had settled what was to be done, Spinetta came back full of news from the Casa Lottieri, where Sister Simona had asked her to spend the day.

As Lucrezia knew—Spinetta said breathlessly—dear mother abbess had died of angina pectoris in the fall of the year. And, before she died, the novice had been professed as nun under the name of Sister Monica. And mother abbess had left the community a letter, saying that the government of the community had of late been harsh and cruel, which was quite contrary to the rule of Saint Augustine, and her dying wish was that Mother Jacopo de' Bovacchiesi should now become abbess, for she was kind and gentle.

And what was left of the community had elected Mother Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi as abbess, Sister Monica voting. And Sister Piera and Sister Simona were now talking of making their peace with the new mother abbess, and of begging her to allow them to return, for they had been very happy in the convent until mother prioress had assumed power; and they had asked Spinetta to join them in their petition.

Lucrezia, listening, embraced Spinetta tenderly,

for she knew that she would have some news for her before very long which would make her sad.

"If Sister Piera and Sister Simona once start talking about sending in a petition that they may renew their vows, they will be years before they send in that petition," said Lucrezia. "I think we may safely say that you can send in your petition with theirs."

"What has happened to mother prioress?" asked Fra Filippo, who had lingered in the room.

"She has been made porteress so that she may trouble no one with her tongue," laughed Spinetta.

"And quite time too," said Fra Filippo. "For that old lady has done more harm than any one else since the days of Judas Iscariot."

CHAPTER XVI

THE STUDY OF THE UFFIZI MADONNA

I

THERE are such things as falls from virtue, each of which is followed by repentance; and there are such things as falls from virtue which plunge the sinner into an almost inevitable course of action and which keeps the sinner submerged for weeks or months or even years. In this case Fra Filippo and Lucrezia determined to live together as man and wife until, at least, the baby was born. Of course in common decency they resolved that their mode of life should not be known to Spinetta, nor apparent to those who lived outside. I do not attempt to condone their conduct, merely to state facts.

So the life in the Via delle Tre Gore went on in a most spiritless manner, the natural life cut off from the supernatural life and the graceful little nun cut off from grace. She excused herself from saying the Divine Office whenever she could do so and, when she could not refuse without disturbing Spinetta, the whole Office, from the Confiteor to the Antiphon of our Lady, became an intense torture to her. The reading of the *Divine Comedy,* again, was far from agreeable; for, now that she had come on to the *Purgatorio,* she found no place for herself in purgatory and could only hope to share

the second circle of hell with Francesca Malatesta: at any rate they would unite in their appreciation of Dante. The one thing that was left to her was her earthly love of Fra Filippo, and this seemed to grow more every day; but, after all, when one is expecting a baby, what is love without marriage?

II

About the end of May Maddalena warned Lucrezia that, unless she wished her sister to find out the truth for herself, it was time for her to tell Spinetta. And, as soon as the two sisters were alone, Lucrezia began:

"Spinetta mia," she said, "are you prepared to face the worst news that is ever likely to come to you?"

Of late Spinetta had been growing silent and restrained, and now she seemed to have a difficulty in answering. "Yes," she said. "I can guess what it is—I—I have not been one of a large family for nothing." And she hurried out of the room, leaving Lucrezia in a terrible state of mind.

In about twenty minutes she came back and, although her face was haggard and worn, her manner was that of one who had regained a complete mastery over her emotions. Going over to Lucrezia, she put her arm round her.

"Lucrezia," she asked, "am I right that you are expecting a—?" And, leaving the word unspoken, she finished the question with her eyebrows.

Lucrezia nodded her head miserably.

"Ah! It is better to know than to guess, and to be told than to suspect," said Spinetta, smiling. "I

had guessed and suspected the truth a fortnight ago, and that was torment to me; now that I know the truth it is a positive relief." The pressure of her arm tightened. "Now, dear," she went on, "you must tell me just what you want to, and no more; for I am your sister, not your judge. If I were your judge, you would find me a very gentle one."

Lucrezia clung to her sister, sobbing half with relief, half with gratitude.

"What has made you so tender to me, little one?" she asked.

Spinetta hugged her sister very closely. "Because I love you, dear," she answered; "and because I am so, so sorry for you." Of a truth, Spinetta was a true Augustinian nun; for few Augustinian nuns are pietists, and most Augustinian nuns, living very close to our Lord, learn to be very like Him.

III

Some seventeen years ago I was talking to a young Oxford man over a last pipe before we went to bed. We were merely hotel acquaintances and, since he had been at Oxford and I at Cambridge, we found no friends in common. Also I was many years his senior.

Presently, after an interval of silence, he said: "It's terrible to see the deterioration in a girl who's gone wrong."

"Yes," I muttered, not knowing what to say.

"She deteriorates in face," he went on; "she deteriorates in mind; she deteriorates altogether."

And there the conversation ended, for it was not my place to invite a confidence; but I knew for cer-

tain that he was speaking of a tragedy that had happened to a girl of the educated class—perhaps to his sweetheart or sister. For a girl of the uneducated class, provided always that she has no religion to speak of—at least certainly in England and probably in America—does not deteriorate in the same way, but most probably marries and becomes an ordinary wife and mother, and a savage does not deteriorate at all; whereas a girl of the educated class who has formed ideals and established a code of ethics and built up a conscience, if she loses her ideals, loses all.

Now Lucrezia de' Buti, who was not only a highly educated girl of Florence and a maiden of much refinement but also a professed nun, deteriorated to a shocking extent during those few months in which she lived as the mistress of Fra Filippo. One has only to look at the face of the Pitti Gallery Madonna, pure and innocent, at the face of the Santa Margherita of the Madonna della Cintola, which is perhaps the sweetest and best face that has ever been painted, and then at the Uffizi Madonna, which was painted in the summer of 1457, to realize the deterioration.

Lucrezia herself would have explained that, since the soul is the form of the body, a change in the soul will immediately show in the face. A psychologist would explain that, since every thoughtful girl of twenty-three has formed her ideals and built up her conscience, the destruction of these ideals and a violation of that conscience must produce a marked mental change. Freud and Brill, whose work deals with the mental degenerate alone, would have nothing to say, because the deterioration of a good girl

of the educated class would be outside their experience.

IV

Now, towards the end of May, Fra Filippo found himself faced with two difficulties. In the first place he had wisely resolved to leave Prato for a few months at the beginning of July; in the second place his money was beginning to run out, and he must try to earn some more by the time that his bambino should be born; so he resolved to try to kill a couple of birds with the same stone.

Of course he had saved a considerable amount of money since he came to Prato; but, as the frescoes on the south side of the *pieve* sanctuary were finished a year ago and he had done nothing since, and as he could not concentrate his mind at present on the huge task of the frescoes for the northern wall, his savings were rapidly vanishing. For he had undertaken a heavy responsibility when he had started to maintain Spinetta as well as Lucrezia and, although their food and upkeep had cost him little, the entire renewal of their wardrobes since they had left the convent had cost him more than he cared to think about. So he wrote to his friend and patron, Giovanni de' Medici, to discover whether there were any contracts for paintings obtainable.

But, before he left Prato for three months, he ardently desired to start a fresh picture with his much loved Lucrezia as the Madonna. So he got out his charcoal and drawing-board, stretched a large sheet of Lucca paper thereon, and prepared to start work.

Spinetta had been washing the Bov'chiesi baby and, as the morning was warm, she wrapped a linen

garment round the child and carried it in to show Lucrezia how much it had grown. Lucrezia, always fond of babies, stood the little fellow on her knee and held him at arm's-length for inspection.

Fra Filippo was standing with a blank sheet of paper before him and some sticks of charcoal in his hand, uncertain how he should draw Lucrezia. Lucrezia was sitting on a chair, holding the infant Bov'chiesi at arm's-length.

"Stay exactly as you are," cried Fra Filippo, throwing down all the sticks of charcoal except one. And he began to draw with lightning strokes, first the baby, then the portion of Lucrezia's hands and arms that held the baby, and last a suggestion of her face. Then he laid down the charcoal and stepped back to see what he had done, whilst Spinetta took the baby and she and Lucrezia came behind Fra Filippo so that they might view the drawing.

"See!" said the friar, looking at Lucrezia. "Our Lady must often have held the Holy Infant exactly as you were holding Maddalena's baby."

They saw, for by this time they knew how to understand an artist's rough drawing.

"Has Our Lady ever been painted like that before?" asked Spinetta, cuddling the infant Bov'chiesi.

"No!" answered Lucrezia, who had seen many pictures in Florence and who thought that she knew all about all the pictures that had ever been painted. "So far painters have always drawn the Divine Infant from the wax bambinos that they place in the Crib at Christmas."

"You are right," cried Fra Filippo. "So far no one has ever painted the Mother of God as a real mother, nor the Word Made Flesh as a real baby."

Then the work of making the drawing commenced in real earnest. The drawing of the baby Bov'chiesi came first, Spinetta and Lucrezia taking turns at holding him and, between them, so petting him and spoiling him in order to make him keep quiet that, by the end of his posing, he was too spoilt for words and gave his mother a fairly hard time for the next six months.

The drawing of Lucrezia as the Madonna came next, and Fra Filippo worked at this with all his skill and all his energy. But, alas, by now the face of Lucrezia had deteriorated, and she was no more like the true Madonna than a Gloire de Dijon rose is like the Mystical Rose of Loretto. She did not as yet see the deterioration, she only saw the skill and artistry that were behind the picture; Fra Filippo did not see it, because he himself had deteriorated; but Spinetta saw it and wept many bitter tears in secret.

At last the drawing was finished and, at the same time, Fra Filippo received a letter from Giovanni de' Medici, Cosimo's brother, telling him that the King of Naples desired a panel and commissioning him to paint one which he might send him, at the same time asking him for a drawing and estimate.

So, in the beginning of July, Fra Filippo packed up his painting materials, rolled up his cartoon of the Uffizi Madonna, said good-by to his much-loved Lucrezia, took his apprentice, Jacopo del Sellajo, a lad of great promise, and set out for Florence. For he had kept on his workshop in Florence in that careless way he had, letting the rent accumulate, and he would be ready to start work at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER XVII

IN FLORENCE

I

THROUGH no love of the King of Naples—for who could love the cruel and treacherous Ferrante?—but through motives of diplomacy, either on behalf of the State of Florence or, more probably, on behalf of the Medici Bank, Giovanni de' Medici desired to present a picture to the king and had commissioned Fra Filippo to paint it.

There is some uncertainty about the painting of this picture for the King of Naples and about the Uffizi Madonna, the art historian Ulmann suggesting that Lippi painted the latter as a kind of gratuity to Giovanni for giving him the Neapolitan commission; but I cannot see the proud and rich Medici stooping to levy blackmail in this manner, nor can I see an artist so well-known as Fra Filippo offering it. That the Uffizi Madonna was painted for Giovanni is certain, for it appears in the inventory of his nephew, Lorenzo, and I think that the whole affair must have happened as follows.

Early in July, Fra Filippo settled down in his old Florentine *bottega* and finished the cartoon for the Uffizi Madonna, introducing two saucy angels as supporting the Infant Jesus and sketching in a background of scenery that was strictly conventional.

Then, as soon as the cartoon was finished, he asked Giovanni to come in and see it.

The Medici, accompanied by his agent Francisco Cantansanti, entered the *bottega,* and Fra Filippo brought out a flask of new Chianti and glasses, for his funds would not now run to a more expensive wine, and, as soon as his visitors were seated, displayed the cartoon.

"Will that do for the King of Naples, excellence?" he asked.

Giovanni looked at the drawing long and earnestly, sipped the rough Chianti, made a wry face for the wine did not suit his refined palate. "Give that divine masterpiece to that brute beast of Naples?" he cried. "May the degraded Bacchus who made this wine fly away with you, Filippo!"

"What shall I do then, eminence?" asked Fra Filippo, gloomily; "for I have no other design by me."

"Heavens, Filippo," answered the Medici. "Paint that picture for me, and draw another design for Ferrante. Mind," he added, "the king is a connoisseur of painting, and the picture must be of your best; but, otherwise, I do not care what he has. I will pay you a hundred florins for each picture framed complete." That was equal to the spending value of £1,200, or $5,800, in the year 1927.

Cantansanti was plucking at the Medici's sleeve; for he had tasted the rough wine and had noticed the bare studio, and he had deduced that the artist was in a temporary state of poverty and that a better bargain might be struck by his employer. But Giovanni de' Medici ignored him.

"I have an important engagement at the end of August in Prato, eminence," urged the friar—he was thinking of Lucrezia's confinement—"and I cannot possibly paint two large panels in two months."

"I must have the Madonna whilst the inspiration is still on you, Filippo," laughed Giovanni; "for, if you let the inspiration slip and start another picture, I shall never get my Madonna. You see that I know you of old, my friend."

Fra Filippo gulped down a large mouthful of wine and thought deeply. If he adopted the old method of panel-painting, it would be utterly impossible to paint the two panels in two months; but, if he discarded the old method of the miniaturists and applied the color in the bold, free strokes which he had learnt from his fresco-work, without troubling to join up the strokes into one smooth, well-finished surface, it would be possible to get through a quantity of work in a short time; also Lucrezia was badly in need of money.

"And you want the two panels completed within two months, eminence?" asked Fra Filippo.

"I want the two panels finished and framed within two months," replied Giovanni.

"Such work has never been attempted before," sighed Fra Filippo; "but, if it can be done, it shall be done."

"Mind, I hold you to your promise, Filippo," said the Medici. And he went off to keep an important engagement, during which hundreds of thousands of florins changed hands, leaving Cantansanti to complete negotiations.

Cantansanti brought out his purse and counted

out fourteen florins—we have the exact amount in a contemporary letter. "This is for the necessary expenses, Fra Filippo," he said.

"Diavolo!" cried the friar. "Two carved frames gilt with fine gold, two panels laid with the finest gesso, to say nothing of expensive pigments. Why, it will cost thirty at the very least!"

But, with a grim smile, Cantansanti put up his purse. He had gaged Fra Filippo's present poverty to a nicety.

II

As soon as Cantansanti had gone, Fra Filippo went out to visit the artists' materials makers. First he went to a panel joiner of good repute, picking up a surfaced panel for the Uffizi Madonna, and ordering a panel to be prepared for the King of Naples' picture. Then he went to the carver's workshop, giving orders for two beautiful frames to be carved in the Florentine manner. So far he had managed to save his small store of florins, obtaining the goods on credit. Then he visited Giovanni Filepepi the gold-beater.

Although he was but thirty-six years old, Giovanni Filepepi was an immensely fat man who was nicknamed from his form and its contents *Il Botticello,* The Barrel.

"Well, old Botticello," asked Fra Filippo, "how goes business?"

"It might be worse and it might be better," answered the Barrel. "When one is not selling fine gold one is buying fine gold, and the difference provides me with a bare living." And he placed a sheet

of fine gold between two layers of gold-beater's skin and began to hammer it out into gold-leaf.

"Stop that noise," said Fra Filippo impatiently, his nerves a little frayed, "and attend to my order, for I require enough gold-leaf to gild two frames of such and such a size."

"And before you can have it, it will cost you such and such money," replied *Il Botticello,* grinning. "Gold-leaf is gold, and gold must be paid for with gold. That is but reasonable."

"And a picture is paid for only when completed," said Fra Filippo.

"And the painter is apt to spend the payment before he has earned it."

"How can a man spend what he has not got?"

"I do not know. I wish that I did," grinned the Barrel. "It is you as a painter who can answer that question, for you painters manage to achieve that miracle. However, no gold, no gold-leaf."

"But these pictures are for Giovanni de' Medici," protested Fra Filippo, "and there is not much chance of anticipating the payment."

"Ah!" replied the Barrel. "That is another matter. The Medici are the same as gold." He thought a moment. "But Giovanni de' Medici must have paid you something in advance," he suggested.

"He left that to Cantansanti, and Cantansanti advanced me this." He displayed the fourteen florins. "Mark you, it is to cover the cost of frames, panels, gold-leaf and pigments."

"The animal!" cried *Il Botticello.* "Of a truth a banker is a beast of prey, and his agent is the jackal."

"Will you supply me with the gold-leaf on part payment?" asked Fra Filippo.

Il Botticello thought for some moments in a slow ponderous way. "Do you need an apprentice?" he asked.

Fra Filippo shrugged his shoulders. "I have a very good apprentice, Jacopo del Sellajo."

"Well, I have a little brother of thirteen who is crazy to become an artist and already shows much promise, and I desire to apprentice him to a painter who is no mere mechanic. Will you take him?"

"Show me some of his work, and I will tell you. So far I have only your judgment that he has talent, and that is worth nothing."

The fat man went to a drawer and brought out a sheaf of drawings. "There! Judge for yourself!" he said ponderously.

Fra Filippo turned over the drawings and drew in his breath sharply; for there was more sheer, though undeveloped, talent in this boy's work than in anything he had ever seen.

"He has imagination," he said.

"He has imagination—too much imagination," answered the Barrel.

"He has some idea of outline," continued the friar.

"Yes," grunted the Barrel.

"And he can depict figures in motion."

"Yes," grunted the Barrel.

"And, if he has the patience to learn to draw properly, he may become a painter. Hell is full of painters who have not had sufficient patience to learn to draw."

"Will you take him as apprentice?" asked *Il Botticello.*

"As I have already told you," answered Fra Filippo, "I have got Jacopo del Sellajo."

"This one is delicate and his mother would not spare him yet," said *Il Botticello.* "But, if you will take him at a reasonable premium in, say, a year's time, I will let you have as much gold-leaf as you require for your frames, half for cash and half on credit. Full payment to be made on the Medici's payment to you."

So the bargain was struck, and sealed in a flagon of very old Chianti, and, when Fra Filippo knew Sandro Botticelli, he realized that it was the best bargain he had ever made.

"I think you want the lad," chuckled *Il Botticello.*

"I do!" answered Fra Filippo.

"Then, if I had only the sense of that fox Cantansanti," he chuckled, "I would have made you pay a premium for your apprentice, instead of paying one myself."

III

Next morning Fra Filippo began his panel of Lucrezia as the Madonna, and wasted not a moment's time. And the boy, Sandro Botticelli, came over to his *bottega* and, having made friends with Jacopo, sat down to watch Fra Filippo at his work.

The friar began like a man possessed, throwing off his old manner of a miniaturist and without any hesitation taking on the new manner of the modern artist.

He painted superbly, quickly as lightning, sure

as death, truthfully as eternity, and his palette seemed to be loaded with light mingled with tenderness. And Sandro Botticelli watched him, forgetting to eat his meals in the fascination of the painting, and absorbing a rich store of experience that should last him throughout his life.

If Fra Filippo had never painted the Uffizi Madonna with his new-found freedom of brush-work, Sandro would never have painted Primavera nor the Birth of Venus, and all this new-found freedom of expression sprang from Fra Filippo's anxiety to get back to the little nun before her trouble was on her. Truly Lucrezia de' Buti figures largely in the history of art.

As he painted, Fra Filippo made many innovations. In the first place, he borrowed an idea from Giotto's fresco of the virtues and vices, painting a frame on the edge of the panel and painting our Lady's elbow and the golden vessel of spikenard outside the painted frame. Next, instead of making the Bambino standing on the Madonna's knee, he painted two Angels supporting the Divine Infant so that our Lady, with closed hands and downcast eyes, might pray to her Son unhampered. Lastly he painted one of the Angels as a saucy child, looking out of the picture; and this, I think, was because he had to get a model from the neighborhood, and the model was a saucy little Florentine boy as impudent as child can be. Of a truth, Fra Filippo could never get away from his model, and he delighted to give a human touch even to his most serious themes. Afterwards, Sandro Botticelli delighted to give his little Angels the same very human touch.

Then, after he had worked hard for a fortnight, Fra Filippo dashed off a design for the Neapolitan picture on the pages of a letter which he sent to Giovanni de' Medici, who was then at his villa in Fiesole. This letter is still preserved in the Archives of the State of Florence, and makes pathetic reading.

Fra Filippo points out that, in the first place, he had received only fourteen florins for the preliminary expenses of his commission instead of the thirty florins which would be required, and that he cannot get on with his work in consequence. That, in the second place, if Giovanni will instruct his steward, Bartolommeo Martelli, to advance him a small sum, he will be content with sixty florins for the Neapolitan picture instead of the hundred florins originally offered. That, in the third place, he will undertake to finish the picture before the 20th of August.

The truth was that Fra Filippo had not enough money to keep body and soul together and was almost starving. That Giovanni de' Medici should have taken advantage of the friar's poverty and have paid him sixty instead of a hundred florins seems almost incredible, for the Medici were never mean in their dealings with the artists, and we are compelled to imagine that Giovanni had left the matter in the hands of Cantansanti and Martelli.

Then the carved frames came home from the carver, and Jacopo who had much experience of gilding, aided by Sandro who had learnt gilding from his brother, were set to work.

IV

The desire to finish his pictures and get home to Lucrezia still drove Fra Filippo forward, but the strong creative impulse which had carried him through the Uffizi Madonna was gone. For, although the picture which Fra Filippo painted for the King of Naples has been lost, we may gather from the sketch in Giovanni's letter that this was not highly inspired, that it was without life and without the divine fire of genius. The sketch shows our Lady kneeling between Saint Michael and Saint Bernard and adoring the Holy Infant, and what can an artist make of such a theme? Still Fra Filippo painted on, sure of his matchless technique, and the picture grew, slowly but certainly. He kept himself going with raw, rough Chianti, careful only that the amount which he drank should not hinder his hand nor bemuddle his brain.

The twentieth of August came and passed, the picture still unfinished. Dated on August 31st, we find a letter from Cantansanti to Giovanni de' Medici, in which the agent says that, during the last few days, he has had to sit beside Fra Filippo in his studio, urging him on by threats and remonstrances to finish his work; for the strain of two pictures in two months was telling and the artist's energy was nearly gone.

Then, on August 30th, Fra Filippo finished his stupendous task, paid *Il Botticello* what was due to him, settled with the joiner and frame-maker, left his landlord to take his rent out of the sale of the contents of the *bottega*, which he seized, saddled his mule and set off for Prato.

He had obtained sufficient experience of business men to last him for the rest of his life, and he chuckled as he thought of his landlord and Cantansanti wrangling over the value of what he had left behind. Cantansanti was bitter about the matter. "You see," he writes to the Medici, "to what dangers this man exposes himself." Of a truth, the worst danger that Fra Filippo had to fear was from the unscrupulous greed and deadly avarice of the Florentine man of business.

During his stay at Florence, Fra Filippo had seen but little of his old friends, for he had been too busy by day and too tired in the evening to leave his studio. For the same reason he had not visited those taverns which were frequented by artists, in which formerly his soul had delighted. This, however, did not trouble him.

What had troubled him was the vaguely unhappy spirit that had crept into the letters which Lucrezia had written him. While these letters were outwardly cheerful and evidently meant to encourage him in his work; yet, reading between the lines, the friar could perceive a regret for the past and a dissatisfaction with the present that was most disquieting. So, on August the 30th, as I have said, he saddled his mule and set off in a hurry for Prato, leaving Jacopo to follow as best he could.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT PRATO

I

WHEN Fra Filippo had started for Florence and Lucrezia had been left alone with Spinetta, a marvelous change had come over the girl's spirit. No longer was she stimulated by the comradeship of her lover, with his great joyousness; no longer was her conscience lulled by his infinite capacity for taking things lightly and easily; rather was she depressed and saddened by his absence. Also she had now the constant companionship of Spinetta, who was sweet and good and altogether on the side of the Angels. This companionship of Spinetta reacted on Lucrezia, who was also by nature sweet and good.

At first Lucrezia would slip away into her bedroom and there she would face the immediate future; for there could be no doubt that, in childbearing, there was always the risk of the mother's death, and, if she died in her present state, the best that could happen to her was an eternal banishment to the second circle of hell in company with the miserable and distracted Francesca Malatesta, and with an endless sense of remorse for her fall with Fra Filippo and a hopeless sorrow for the sin which she had helped to bring into his life.

Then a better state of mind came over her, and, from remorse, she gradually passed into the state of

turning to God; and now, instead of slipping into her bedroom, she would slip over to the *pieve* and kneel quietly before the altar; and, always, as she passed under the lovely bas-relief of our Lady holding the Holy Child, which Luca della Robbia had wrought many years previously and which is still above the *pieve* doorway, she would look up and ask the Mater Purissima to help her in her present trouble.

Then, one day—this was on August the 20th, the day on which Fra Filippo had originally planned to return to Prato—the divine gift of contrition came to Lucrezia; and now she no longer feared hell and she no longer feared God, for all sense of fear was lost in the sense of sorrow for what she had done.

Here was she who had deliberately and solemnly vowed a life of entire fidelity to her Divine Spouse. The fingers of one hand went to the wedding-ring which she still wore as a token of her marriage to her Heavenly Bridegroom, the Bridegroom who had been crucified for her, and she turned it slowly on her finger. She, Lucrezia, had been of her own free will and own free choice espoused to Him who had died for her, in trouble and in joy, in sickness and in health, until death should take her to His immediate presence, there to rest in the fulness of His Divine love for ever. This union of her spiritual marriage should have been infinitely closer than that which bound an earthly wife to an earthly husband and infinitely more sacred. And she had violated this spiritual marriage in the arms of a human lover.

What would she say of a wife who betrayed a

loving, tender and attractive husband? She could think of nothing that would be bad enough! And here was she who had been faithless to a Spouse whose love had made Him ready to die for her and whose tenderness was amazing. And, what was more, she had betrayed Him for Fra Filippo who was, by his vows, His own sworn servant.

Then, at last, the far-reaching and fearful effect that her sin had wrought in her own soul came before her—the wilful offense against God, the entire losing of His presence, and the forfeiting of His grace. Why, the very act of turning to Him, as she was turning to Him now, was granted to her through His unmerited and undeserved mercy.

Several people had drawn close to one of the confessionals, and a priest was coming out of the sacristy. She looked at him, and looked at him again, recognizing that he was the wise and kindly old priest who had heard Fra Filippo's confession at the beginning of Lent and of whom he had told her. And, in an instant, it came to her that now was her chance to put herself right with God and that, if she missed this chance, she might never have another. So she got up and, going over, knelt at the end of the row of penitents.

The first woman went into the confessional box. She had evidently some scruple or difficulty in her confession, and she seemed to Lucrezia to remain in the box for an endless time; but Lucrezia resolutely waited on, afraid that, if she let this chance slip, she might never get another.

The woman came out. The man who followed was unusually quick, and Lucrezia became scared lest her turn should come before she could collect

her thoughts and remember what she wanted to say.

Two children passed in and out of the box like lightning, and Lucrezia's fright became worse.

A woman went in, and came out in three minutes.

Then Lucrezia's turn came, and she went in, her mind a complete tangle.

"Father," she began in despair, "I am a nun who has broken enclosure, and I have sinned, and—and I have a terrible confession to make, and—and I cannot remember anything."

"Keep calm, my child," said the priest, kindly. "It will come back to you presently. Take your time and do not try to hurry."

"Could I not make my confession at some other time?" asked Lucrezia, desperately. "And could not I make it in some place that is more private?"

"What time could be better than the present?" said the priest, and his voice was very grave. "What place could be more private than the confessional?"

"But I have much to tell you," said poor Lucrezia, "and there are many things upon which I need your advice, and the other penitents will be waiting and wondering."

The priest, who was used to the terror which some people suffer in the confessional, thought a moment. "Are you living in Prato?" he asked.

"Yes, father. I am lodging here."

"And is there a respectable woman in your lodging so that I can visit you without any chance of scandal?"

"Yes, father. And when can you come?"

"The sooner the better," said the priest, for he had much experience, and he knew that penitents

are apt to become terror-stricken at the prospect of confession and to try to evade it.

"My sister who is living with me will be away this afternoon, father. Could you come then?" And she gave him her address.

"Certainly! And, if you tell the woman that you are expecting me, and if you ask her to show me into your sitting-room, I need not know your name. It will make it easier for you if you feel that I do not know you outside the confessional."

"Thank you, father," murmured Lucrezia. And she rose to go.

"Remember, my child," said the priest, "that the confessional is an instrument of mercy, and that God is very merciful. I will call about two hours after midday."

Lucrezia's mind was ringing with relief, for she had burnt her boats; her soul was singing with joy, for the old priest was very kind and gentle. So she went home to Maddalena and told her that a priest from the *pieve* would be calling to see her at two hours after noon, and that she must show him at once into her sitting-room.

"A priest?" cried Maddalena, horror-struck. "He will have you spirited back into the convent before you can turn round, and what will poor Fra Filippo say then?"

"Nonsense!" said Lucrezia, laughing out of sheer nervous excitement. "The difficulty is to get into a convent, not to get out. Why, the convent key is always in the door and the porteress away after various tasks, and I could escape at any time."

But Maddalena shook her head. The past few months, during which she had been condoning the

most serious sin that two Catholics could commit, had made her very irreligious and very suspicious of religion.

Then Lucrezia found Spinetta and hugged and kissed her; but, since the confession had yet to be made, she did not tell her what she had done.

The *pieve* bell rang for noontime Angelus, and Spinetta and Lucrezia went in to dinner.

II

Spinetta had gone to spend the afternoon with Sister Simona, and Lucrezia was left alone with her thoughts. Since she had made up her mind to confess her sins, honestly and without reservation, she did not give way to useless thoughts nor vain regrets. Once Maddalena came into the room, exhorting her to be careful what she said to the priest lest she should get Fra Filippo into trouble, and Lucrezia had ridiculed her; but then Maddalena did not know that her lodger was intending to make her confession, in which the mention of anyone by name is not permitted. At two o'clock the priest arrived.

Maddalena showed him up into the sitting-room with scarcely a word of greeting, and, as soon as the door was closed, the priest sat down and Lucrezia, kneeling at a prayer-desk, began her confession.

But, presently, when the girl had mentioned that she was shortly to become a mother, the priest made her get up from her knees and seat herself on a chair.

"I will seat myself near you so that I can hear you without seeing your face," he said. "It will be easier for you if you cannot see my face."

Then the confession went on to the bitter end, and the priest began to ask some necessary questions.

"Was the man bound by any vow, the marriage vow for instance, my child?" he asked; "because that would make your sin more serious."

"He is a friar, father."

"Did you consent willingly to the sin?"

"It—it just happened, father. There was no persuasion on either side."

"Then, my child, you have wronged the man seriously. For, having once given way to the sin of incontinency, he has laid himself open to further temptation." He paused a moment. "Of course you have either left him, or you intend to leave him at once?"

"He is living in the house, and I have nowhere else to go."

"Nowhere else where you can go, even though it should involve hardship?"

"Absolutely nowhere, father, and I have no money of my own."

The priest thought a minute, for there was the coming baby to be considered. "Is he a well-meaning man?" he asked.

"Save for this sin, he is a very good man, and he is very kind and thoughtful of others."

"And, if I should be able to give you absolution, will you promise to tell him the moment he returns that you have been to confession and made your peace with God?"

"Of course, father."

The priest considered for a few minutes, for the

situation was not at all an easy one. On the one hand, it was impossible for the girl and her child to continue long in the friar's house, maintained by him. On the other hand, it would be impossible for the young mother to maintain herself and the child on absolutely nothing. By now he had guessed that the friar must be that Fra Filippo who had decorated the *pieve,* but the seal of the confessional had made this knowledge useless. Then he suddenly remembered that this same Fra Filippo was a good-hearted, though careless and improvident, fellow.

"I can see no way out of this difficulty," he said, sighing. "You say that the man is a good-hearted and kind person. Tell him the whole truth. Tell him that you have been most unhappy in your sin; tell him that you desire earnestly to sin no more; and tell him that you desire to be freed from the cause of temptation. Then try to persuade him to live in another house. As it is now, the danger to you both is too terrible. For a time we can plan no further in that direction."

A fear had been pressing on Lucrezia's spirit. "If they will receive me back, father, ought I to return to the convent from which I fled?"

"Certainly not at present!" answered the priest. "The baby will be your first care, and until he is weaned and provided for, you must not think of leaving him. Afterwards, if God is kind, you ought to try to return."

"Thank you, father," murmured Lucrezia.

"Now," said the priest, "although I am certain of your good dispositions, I cannot give you absolution until I have referred the matter to the bishop.

The sacrilege of breaking your vows with a friar is too serious for me to handle. I will refer the matter to the bishop immediately."

He paused. "How soon are you expecting your baby?"

"In a week, father, perhaps earlier."

"Dear Madonna!" he cried. "Then there is no time to waste! To-morrow—no, this afternoon—I will ride over to Pistoja and see the bishop or his vicar; and to-morrow, if the bishop consents, I will give you absolution."

Lucrezia's sigh of relief was near a sob.

"In the meantime, my child, take courage! Your intentions are excellent, and God looks at the heart."

"Father," cried Lucrezia, "however can I thank you enough for all your kindness?"

"By praying God to forgive me for my own most grievous faults, my child." And, rising, he went out of the room, leaving Lucrezia to make her thanksgiving. He stole down the stairs and let himself quietly out of the front door.

It is true that the people used to say that this old priest had no faults, but, all the same, he managed to find plenty for himself.

III

The next day, having had a successful interview with the Bishop of Pistoja, the old priest returned to Prato and gave Lucrezia absolution.

Five days after, her baby was born, a fine healthy boy.

CHAPTER XIX

FILIPPINO

I

AS long as Fra Filippo had been struggling to finish the picture for King Ferrante so that he might get back to Lucrezia before her trouble came on her, he could think of naught else; besides he was so hag-ridden by the fact that he had to finish the Neapolitan picture by a certain date that he could think of nothing but its completion. But, when he had risen betimes, mounted his old mule and set out for Prato, his thoughts moved forward.

What if the baby should be born before he reached Prato? What if Lucrezia should die in childbed? What if she should die with their sin still on her, unconfessed, unshriven? And his weary mind, as weary minds will, elaborated the idea, recalling all the cases of death in childbirth that came within his memory.

He flogged on that poor mule until that mule was never entirely serviceable again. He pressed it into a rough gallop, for he had bought the animal on account of its extreme cheapness and its paces were as rough as the sea, until his rupture was more painful than it had been for the last three years. And all the time he thought: "What if Lucrezia should die unshriven?" And the thought developed and grew fixed, until the pain of the rupture

became a positive relief from his mental agony, and he felt that he would make any sacrifice in the world if he found that she had not died in her sin. For, whatever faults have been brought against Fra Filippo, no one has ventured to suggest that he ever lost his faith.

II

Fra Filippo pulled up the mule at the door of his house in the Via delle Tre Gore, scrambled off its back and tottered into the house, almost too tired to move. As he opened the door, a baby's crying struck his ears.

Maddalena ran out of the kitchen to welcome him. "He is a fine, lusty boy, padre," she cried, "and Madonna Lucrezia is doing well."

"Thank God!" muttered the friar, pushing past her and beginning to climb the stairs with difficulty, for his pain was sore.

"A moment, padre!" cried Maddalena. "Don't excite her, and don't stay long or you may set up the fever."

"And that," she muttered to herself, "will keep him from learning about that old priest's visit for the present; for I must have a word with him before madonna tells him herself."

Again Fra Filippo suffered an interruption; since Spinetta, hearing his step, had come out of Lucrezia's room to caution him. "She is doing well," she whispered. "But don't stay long and don't excite her."

He pressed Spinetta's arm affectionately as he passed in. Although he was conscious that the girl did not approve of him, he could not help liking

Spinetta, both on account of her love of Lucrezia and for her tactful straightforwardness.

III

The sitting-room had been turned into a bedroom for the time, and Lucrezia lay propped up a little on the bed, looking as fair and fresh and frail and lovely as only a young mother can look. By now her hair had been caught up into a knot at the back of her head and she had lost the look of a serving-boy on a festa.

"Filippo," she whispered; but purposely she held her baby against her breast, so that she could not hold out her arms to him.

As he bent down to kiss her, his face was working strangely, and his kiss was such that she could return it with a clear conscience.

"You have not kissed your bambino, Filippo," she said, moving a little in order to show him the baby.

He kissed the baby, and, again, kissed Lucrezia.

"But you have not looked at your baby," she chided. "See, he has a good face and a clever face; and see, he has the hands of a true artist."

And then Fra Filippo's feelings became too much for him, and, kneeling down and burying his face in the bedclothes, his shoulders shook with great sobs.

"I feared that you might die unshriven, Lucrezia," he sobbed.

"Eh?" she thrilled, triumphant; "but I have been absolved, my Filippo."

Amazement overcame every other emotion, and Fra Filippo looked up.

"By whom?" he asked.

"By the same old priest who absolved you last Lent twelve-months—the priest that you said was so wise and gentle."

"Good God!" he cried and, kissing her once again, he stumbled to his feet and made for the door.

"You have not kissed your bambino good-by!" she cried. But he was already out of the room and the door was closing behind him.

IV

Always impetuous, Fra Filippo was down the stairs and out of the house before Spinetta or Maddalena could get a word with him. Bearing to the right, he limped across the Pieve Square, turning down a lane that led to the house of the old priest who had heard his confession some nineteen months ago. Reaching the house, and without waiting to knock, he burst through the door and into the priest's sitting-room.

"Father," he cried, "God reward you for all that you have done to Lucrezia."

But the priest, who had already connected him in his thoughts with Lucrezia, checked him. "A moment!" he said. "What you have to say to me had best be said in confession—that is, if you are prepared to make your confession—then all you say is bound to be kept secret."

And, without more to-do, the friar went down on his knees and commenced his confession. *"Confiteor Deo omnipotenti,"* he began, and out came the whole truth, without any reservations, without any

extenuation, as the whole truth does come out in a man's confession. Whilst he made it clear that there had been no planning and no premeditation on his part, but rather a criminal yielding to the temptation of the flesh, he took the whole blame on his shoulders, pointing out the terrible injury he had done to an innocent young nun. There was no questioning needed; every point was made clear and plain.

Then the old priest had his say, and, believe me, there was no mincing matters. For the priest elaborated on the double sacrilege and the serious handicap with which the baby had been brought into the world.

"And," said the priest, "I must get permission from the bishop before I can absolve you. But first," he continued, "I must be assured that you intend to avoid the occasion of sin; since, if you continue to live under the same roof as the girl with whom you have already sinned, a return to your sin is almost inevitable."

"I will leave the house and return to my old home to-morrow!" cried Fra Filippo.

"Nor ought you to see the girl too frequently, nor ought you to see her except in the presence of her sister."

"Of course not, father!" cried Fra Filippo.

"Now concerning the child," continued the priest. And he listened in silence to Fra Filippo's promise that he would make it easy for Lucrezia to return to her convent and would devote himself to the child's upbringing. In his present state of mind the friar would have promised anything.

V

Fra Filippo returned to his house, he entered silently, he climbed the stairs slowly and laboriously, he put his head into Lucrezia's room.

"Loved one," he said, "I have been to confession, and I am returning to my house in the Piazza del Mercatale to-morrow, and all shall be as you wish." Spinetta was in the room, but he was in no mood for discretion.

Then, mindful that Lucrezia must not be excited for fear of the fever, he went downstairs to his own room. But, this time, he did not move so silently and, hearing him, Maddalena came hurrying in.

"Padre," she burst forth, "I have bad news for you. Madonna Lucrezia has had a priest to see her and, since he has brought her the Most Holy Sacrament, she must have been to confession. And what will you do now?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Ebbene! Has the man no sense?" she cried. "You must know what I mean!"

He shook his head.

"Why," she cried, "with a lady like Madonna Lucrezia there can be no half measures, she is far too honest and straightforward for that! She will forsake you."

He was awake at last. "What do you mean?" he asked, knowing full well what she meant.

"That she will return to her duties and refuse to be your inamorata!"

"Oh, you wicked woman!" he cried. "For a friar, and one who has been a nun, the sin is terrible; but, all the same, they were carried away by

passion. For a wicked woman who, out of the vileness of her heart, holds a candle to such a sin, the crime is unspeakable. Go to confession, go to confession at once, Maddalena, else there is no hope of your salvation."

The girl, frightened to death, fell on her knees and began to mumble the confiteor.

"Not to me!" thundered Fra Filippo. "I am too nearly related to your sin to hear you. Go immediately to the priest who lives at"—here he mentioned his address—"and ask him to hear your confession immediately."

"But, padre," cried Maddalena, her second nature getting the better of her, "I have a lovely dinner ready for you and, if I go now, it will be ruined."

"Go at once," he thundered. "Go at once, you miserable woman! What is meat, when your immortal soul is at stake?"

"But there is also pastry and fruit," sobbed Maddalena.

"Go!" thundered Fra Filippo, throwing open the door; and Maddalena, catching up a shawl, fled.

It is to be feared that the old priest was not as gentle with Maddalena as he had been with Lucrezia. There was too much of "Fra Filippo bade me come," about her confession to please him, and too little personal contrition. Anyhow Maddalena left the priest's house much chastened and subdued.

VI

As soon as Maddalena had gone, Fra Filippo stole up the stairs with elaborate caution and, peep-

ing in at the door of Lucrezia's bedroom, beckoned to Spinetta.

The girl came out to him, her face suspiciously grave.

"I have had to send Maddalena on an errand," he whispered, "and the dinner is ready to be sent in and I am starving. Could you leave Lucrezia long enough to dish up the dinner, and bring it in, and join me at my repast?"

"Yes," she answered; and Fra Filippo, hearing something that was suspiciously like a titter, looked at her. But her face was as grave as that of a sculptured saint. "I too shall be glad of my dinner," she said, "for I too am hungry. Yet, if you can bear with your hunger for two minutes longer, Lucrezia wants me to show you your bambino first."

"But will it not excite her?" he asked.

"Joy and thankfulness never excite injuriously," she answered, and she led the way into the room.

A cloud had hidden the sun; so, lifting the baby in her arms, Spinetta carried him over to the window. "There!" said she. "Is not he a little masterpiece?"

"And I am going to have him christened by the name of Filippino," said Lucrezia from her bed. "That is, if it is permitted, Filippo," she added.

Spinetta uncovered the baby, and Fra Filippo, feeling that he loved all babies and all persons more than tongue could tell, placed his arm affectionately round Spinetta and the bambino.

At that moment, as ill-luck would have it, Maria, the wife of Antonio di Matteo the grocer, who lived in the house immediately opposite, looked out

of her window and called to her husband who was in his shop.

"Antonio," she said, "I told you that there was a baby in the house over the way. And now the mother has brought it to the window, and Fra Filippo is embracing her in the sight of the whole of Prato."

"Ah!" chuckled Antonio, running to the window and peering for all that he was worth. "That Fra Filippo is a gay dog."

"Alas, the scandal!" muttered his wife.

"What is the woman's name?" asked Antonio.

"Spinetta di Francesco," answered his wife. "Until now I never knew which of the two girls was the mother."

Then Spinetta left her window in order to return the child to Lucrezia, and the grocer and his wife could see no more.

"Now, Filippo," said Spinetta, "I will leave you a moment whilst I go to bring in dinner."

VII

Lucrezia looked up at Fra Filippo and laughed. "You sent poor Maddalena off to her duties in a fine hurry," she said demurely.

"Eh?"

"'Go to confession, go to confession at once, Maddalena,'" she quoted, "'else there is no hope of your salvation. Go at once, you miserable woman. Go!'"

"Then you heard me?"

"When you are angry, my Filippo, you do not whisper."

"And that is why Spinetta laughed just now, for she must have heard me too. All the same," he added, with determination, "it was right that she should go."

Lucrezia was looking at him with her heart in her eyes. "Oh, Filippo," she whispered, "I am the happiest girl in all the whole of Italy. I was miserable when I had been shriven and I knew that you were unabsolved."

He put out his arm as though to embrace her, but she checked him. "Is it wise?" she asked.

"It is most unwise!" he answered, curbing himself rigorously.

"And now you had better go down to your dinner," she advised, "else Spinetta will eat it all, for she is simply ravenous with hunger."

And, prudently, he went.

VIII

There were two capons, with pastry as light as air and abundance of fruit to follow, and, whilst the friar unfolded his plans for the future, Fra Filippo and Spinetta feasted hungrily. Fra Filippo was going to his house in the Piazza del Mercatale on the morrow, and he intended to see Lucrezia only in the presence of Spinetta for the future, and, if Lucrezia should think fit to go back to the Convent of Santa Margherita, he was going to devote himself to Filippino, and he had the very treasure of an apprentice coming to him, and—

And, limping over to his saddle-bags which he had brought in, he took out a bag containing one

hundred and twenty golden florins and planked them down on the table.

"Take these and spend them to the best advantage, Spinetta," he bade her, "letting me have a very little for myself from time to time. I am a careless fellow and very extravagant."

"You *are* extravagant!" she laughed. "For, when you find that Lucrezia has been cleansed, you start cleansing yourself and, immediately, start cleaning up poor Maddalena. God help the girl who is bound to one who has the artistic temperament. He is very thorough—while the fit lasts."

"Perhaps the fit will last this time," said Fra Filippo, softly. "You see, I have Lucrezia and her bambino to think of now."

Altogether the meal was a gay one and, perhaps, a trifle hysterical.

In the middle of the gaiety, a tear-stained Maddalena returned. She listened at Fra Filippo's door. Then she went up to Lucrezia's room and, listening outside the door, heard her crooning happily to her baby.

"Of a truth," she murmured, "these two are veritable saints; for, instead of being sad at the ending of their romance, they are happier than words can express." And promptly she began to build up a holy romance of a Saint Filippo and a Saint Lucrezia, which was highly edifying to her, and more healthy than the romantic imaginings in which she had aforetime indulged.

All of which appears to show that, although Fra Filippo might seem to have treated Maddalena harshly and unjustly, he did what was best for her.

IX

That night Lucrezia fell asleep feeling happier than she had felt for many months, and she awoke next morning radiantly happy; for, when a girl has lived very close to God all her life with the exception of the last ten months, she is at home and happy when she is in a state of grace. Looking back at her ten months' journey into the realm of mortal sin, where God is not, the time seemed like a doleful nightmare, and she was happy to be awake and safely returned to Him.

But with Fra Filippo, who had not been accustomed to live close to God since he had left the Carmine, the case was far different. Because, in the first place, his rupture would not let him sleep; and, in the second place, the uplift and joy of his repentance, during which he had been ready to give up Lucrezia at the cost of any self-sacrifice, had worn off and the reaction had set in. Of course he did not think of returning to Lucrezia as her lover, and only regarded her in his mind as his sweet and much-loved friend; but he resented losing the constant intercourse with his closest friend, and especially dreaded the time when she should return to her convent and leave him desolate.

However, a sleepless night is the time when dark and despondent thoughts run riot and, when daylight came, he felt happier and more resigned. Presently, when he had got up and dressed, things looked brighter. At any rate he had made his peace with God, Lucrezia's return to her convent was far distant, he could see her not too seldom in the presence of Spinetta, whilst the baby Filippino would soon be growing very dear to him.

CHAPTER XX

WINNING THROUGH

I

DURING the next fifteen months, Lucrezia and Fra Filippo went through a terrible struggle to keep the good resolutions which they had made at the time of their repentance, and the temptations which assailed Lucrezia and Fra Filippo came respectively from different directions; for, from the side on which the earthworks have been broken down and trampled by the footsteps of habit, from that side does the enemy attack.

With Lucrezia the effect of ten months' indulgence in sin, during which time her life had been overshadowed by remorse, was counteracted by her twenty years' habit of responding to grace, and no attack was made from that side. But, as the baby Filippino came to wind himself more and more closely round her heart and as Fra Filippo became more and more considerate and thoughtful of her welfare, so she became more and more adverse to the idea of returning to her convent. Yet she knew that it was clearly her duty to keep those vows which she had made when she had entered the religious life, and she prayed many times a day for strength to do so.

With Fra Filippo, whose earthworks had been trampled down by twenty years of self-indulgence, the attack was launched through those passions

which had been developed by self-indulgence, and it was chiefly by means of the practise of having Spinetta present during his visits to Lucrezia that he escaped. It was all very well for him to tell himself over and over again that he must never be so base as to join with the enemy in a fresh attack on Lucrezia's virtue; but, when he came to actual performance, he found that the influence of conscience is not sufficiently powerful to govern a man whose will has been weakened by the habit of non-resistance. And on one occasion, when Spinetta was paying a visit to the Casa Lottieri and Fra Filippo found Lucrezia alone, he saved himself only by an immediate flight. Of course one might justly presume that Lucrezia would have been preserved by her newly recovered practise of responding to grace: but, if Fra Filippo had fallen sufficiently to tempt Lucrezia to resume their recent relations, his guilt would have been the same even though the girl had resisted his advances, and he knew it. Altogether, the unfortunate friar was not in an enviable state of mind.

As to Fra Filippo's financial affairs:—The Firm of Lippi and Diamante seems to have been doing a regular, if second-rate, business that was sufficient to maintain Fra Filippo, Fra Diamante and the workmen, with a little over for Fra Filippo to spend on the household in the Via delle Tre Gore. Also the money which the friar had earned from Giovanni de' Medici must have formed a most satisfactory reserve. Certainly there is no record that either of the partners suffered from any financial difficulty during this period.

II

It was the day after the day on which Spinetta had visited the Casa Lottieri and Fra Filippo had resisted his temptation that he perceived the strong necessity of taking active steps in the matter. He had passed a restless night and had gone over the incident in an exaggerated aspect, and he was feeling as despondent as man could feel, when, suddenly, the need of confession came upon him. So, without delay, he visited the old priest who had been such a help to him in the past, and opened his heart.

"My son," said the priest, "if you expect to be free from temptation, you are expecting a state that is but rarely attained in this life. In the next, eh?, things will be different. But, here, although the guilt of your sin was absolved in the confessional, yet the memory of the sin and its sensual attraction remains. Consequently, until your perfect contrition for your sin, because it is hateful to Almighty God, burns up the desire to commit that sin, you cannot escape temptation. But take courage; for you ran away from the temptation, which was the only thing that you could do."

The friar groaned, for the future looked black to him. "Can I do nothing?" he asked.

The old priest thought a moment. "Does the girl still desire to return to her convent?" he enquired.

"Yes, father!" replied Fra Filippo with sincerity; because Lucrezia had kept to herself her dread of leaving Filippino and him and, only two days since,

had asked him to pray that she might return to Santa Margherita.

"Then I advise you to do all that is in your power to help her in her good resolution; since, if she goes back to her convent, the temptation will be removed from you; while, as for her, she will be in a place of safety."

"Father," cried Fra Filippo impulsively, "I shall do all in my power to help her to return to her convent; since, although she is as good as a golden florin, I am the most weak and unreliable fellow."

And, having finished his confession, Fra Filippo left the old priest's house as full of good resolutions as an olive is full of oil. He knew that what the old priest said was true and that, if only Lucrezia could be restored to her convent, he would be placed outside the zone of physical temptation and she in a place of safety.

So, as soon as Fra Diamante had come home to dinner, Fra Filippo approached him.

"That panel of the Nativity which you are painting for the Abbess of Santa Margherita is almost completed, is it not?" he asked.

"Almost, Filippo," answered Diamante. "Another day or two will see it finished."

"Then, after dinner, I shall call to make my peace with the abbess and offer to paint her a predella to match it."

"It is time you made your peace with Santa Margherita," sniffed Diamante. "During the two years in which you have been its chaplain, you have performed your task for three months only, and have left me to do all your duties for the remaining twenty-one months."

"At any rate," snapped Fra Filippo, "I have paid you for saying Mass at the convent."

"And pocketed the difference," sniffed Fra Diamante.

Fra Filippo relapsed into silence, planning how he might make his peace with the abbess, and how he might discover her feelings towards Lucrezia, and how he might find out whether the other errant nuns had opened any negotiation concerning their return to the cloister. For, at that moment, Fra Filippo was feeling full of fervor and desperately anxious to avoid almost certain temptation for himself and possible temptation for Lucrezia.

III

Fra Filippo knocked at the entrance of the Convent of Santa Margherita and the present porteress, late prioress, after peeping through the grille, opened the door.

"Greeting, sister," said Fra Filippo, benignly. "I have called to pay my respects to the Lady Abbess."

Since the porteress had ceased to be prioress, the fountains of her speech had been dried up; and, bowing, she led Fra Filippo into the guest-room. "I will tell mother abbess," she murmured, and went to fetch her.

Presently the Abbess Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi came in, holding out both her hands in welcome; for she had liked Fra Filippo greatly and had no quarrel with him.

"I am overjoyed to see you, Fra Filippo," she said; "especially as I have a message for you from

my sister, the late abbess, which has been waiting for you since she died. She bade me tell you that she was deeply grateful for all your kindness and wisdom"—Fra Filippo thought of his conduct with Lucrezia, and shuddered. "Also she bade me tell you that she bitterly regretted that she had not listened to your advice when you urged her to replace the late prioress."

The friar murmured his thanks, his conscience hurting him terribly all the time.

"Is there any chance of your resuming your office of chaplain?" asked the abbess, smiling. "Of course we like Fra Diamante; but you are our appointed chaplain. As you see, the late prioress is now porteress, and she has become a very silent woman."

Fra Filippo murmured that he was considering the matter and would let her know for certain on the morrow. "And," he said, taking the plunge, "have you heard anything about those nuns who left the convent, whether they desire to return?"

"It is strange that you should ask this," she answered; "for, only this morning I had a tentative message from Sister Simona, expressing great contrition for what she had done and hinting that she and the others might petition to return. But, of course, I must obtain the bishop's leave first." She paused. "I have heard of the three Prato nuns from time to time, but I have lost all sight of Sister Lucrezia and Sister Spinetta from the day on which they broke enclosure. I expect that they went to their friends in Florence."

Fra Filippo kept silence, deeming it wiser as well as more truthful to change the subject.

"I have heard of the panel of the Nativity which Fra Diamante is painting for you, mother abbess," he said. "Now I offer to paint you a predella for the same picture, charging you merely for the cost of wood and pigments. It is as a peace-offering."

"But it is we who should make the peace-offering," cried the abbess. "It is we who drove you from your post through our prioress. At the least, if you paint the predella—which I much desire—you must allow us to pay a fair price as the remuneration for your skill."

The friar shook his head. "Perchance, if Fra Diamante should assist me in the work," he suggested, "you might give him a small present, for Diamante dearly loves a little money; but, as for myself, my work is in the nature of a peace-offering." And so it was, a tiny peace-offering for his abduction of Sister Lucrezia.

"Then about your resumption of your chaplaincy, Fra Filippo?" asked the abbess.

"I shall say Mass in your chapel to-morrow morning," he answered, impetuous as ever.

Leaving the convent, he went over to the house in the Via delle Tre Gore.

IV

When Fra Filippo reached his house in the Via delle Tre Gore, the small Filippino had just waked up from a long siesta and was undergoing a severe petting from his mother and aunt, with cheerful approval.

"See, Filippo," said Lucrezia, looking up and smiling, "the bambino is growing so strong and so

bold and so saucy that there is no holding him."

"He's as strong as Hercules and as saucy as Hebe," replied the friar, his thoughts full of graver matters. "But be prepared for serious news: I have made my peace with the Convent of Santa Margherita, and have undertaken to paint a predella for the new Nativity that Fra Diamante is just completing."

"Filippo!" cried Lucrezia, amazed.

"Also," continued the friar, "I have almost been persuaded to resume my duties as chaplain—at any rate I have promised to say Mass at the convent to-morrow."

For several reasons this announcement came as a shock, then the girl's sound common sense got the upper hand. "Thank God!" she murmured; for, during the past few months, she had been conscious that a priest who does not say his Mass is in a very unsatisfied and unsatisfactory state of mind.

There was a silence. Both for Lucrezia's sake and Fra Filippo's sake it was undesirable that he should speak of her return to Santa Margherita, whilst Spinetta was in the room. Presently, however, Spinetta went downstairs in order to prepare some food for the baby, and then Fra Filippo spoke.

"Lucrezia," he said, "the abbess told me that Sister Simona and some of the others were beginning to feel the way for a return to the convent, and she seemed kindly disposed towards them."

Biting her lips hard, Lucrezia bent over Filippino. "I can't leave my bambino yet—not for another year," she said, trying to repress her emotion.

"As you yourself said," he answered, "if these young nuns start talking about going back, they will talk and talk for a year before they do anything definite. There is no need for my sweet one to hurry."

Lucrezia swallowed the lump that was in her throat. "I suppose I shall have to go back some day," she sighed. Then a brighter thought struck her. "If you are chaplain when I go back," she cried, "I shall still be able to see something of you, Filippo. Also you will be able to tell me how my baby is getting on."

"I had not thought of that!" murmured Fra Filippo, scratching his chin. Indeed, since his confession, his mind had been so intently concentrated on doing his duty and on helping Lucrezia to do hers that the manifest advantage of resuming his chaplaincy had not occurred to him.

"And, if I return, you will take care of our bambino, Filippo?"

"He will be the first thing in the whole world to me!" he answered, speaking with his whole heart.

"And how do you intend to bring him up?" The future was looking vastly more cheerful to Lucrezia now.

The advice of the old priest was strong in the friar's memory. "I shall try to keep him from falling into grievous sin," he answered. "Each grievous sin that is indulged in is a source of temptation in the future."

"Ah! That is well said!" she cried. "You remind me of the old poem which my uncle used to quote to us when we were children.

" 'Say, wouldst thou guard thy son,
That sorrow he may shun?
Begin from the beginning
And let him keep from sinning!' "

And so the talk about the future welfare of the small Filippino went on until Spinetta's return.

"Spinetta," said Fra Filippo, "the abbess told me this morning that Sister Simona and some of the others were beginning to feel the way for a return to the convent."

Spinetta laughed. "They were talking about it at Casa Lottieri yesterday; but, bless you, talk is the breath of their nostrils. It does not mean much."

V

From this time, although they were not altogether removed, the physical temptations of Fra Filippo became much lessened, and he grew more wrapped up in Filippino each day. But, as the days wore on, poor Lucrezia liked the thought of leaving her baby less and less. So, as usual with those that sin, the woman had the hardest sacrifice.

As for Maddalena, her imagination wove more wonderful romances of Saint Filippo and Saint Lucrezia each fresh day, and these she told to her husband in the evening instead of the romances of Boccaccio. Not that it mattered much to Piero, since the mind of Piero Bov'chiesi was like a chunk of mud which was wrapped round the roots of his spring vegetables. The early spring vegetables were coming on nicely, and that was sufficient.

CHAPTER XXI

REPARATION

I

DURING the spring and summer of 1458 things went on smoothly in their natural course, Lucrezia confident that it would be wrong for her to return to Santa Margherita until her baby was fit to be left, and Spinetta slowly and deliberately preparing herself for her return to the religious life. Also we must assume that the three other fugitive nuns were much in the same state as Spinetta. For it creates a severe upheaval in the mind of a nun when she leaves her convent and returns to the world, and it must therefore take time for her mind to regain its equilibrium. In short, experience teaches us that it would have been nothing less than a miracle if any of the five errant ones had petitioned for a return sooner than they did.

Then, in the late autumn of 1458, the minds of the five nuns having recovered their balance and Filippino now being a fine, healthy boy of a year old, the five consciences began to work, the conscience of one supplying what the conscience of another lacked, and the fugitive sisters sent a humble petition to the abbess asking that they might be taken back.

Letters passed between the abbess and the bishop; letters passed between the abbess and the fugitives; finally the authorities decided that, since there were

extenuating circumstances—the extenuating circumstances being the conduct of the late prioress—the five might return as novices before Christmas, and, if they passed through a year's novitiate humbly and well, might be restored to the position of professed choir nuns by the Christmas of 1459.

II

Did Lucrezia tell Sisters Piera, Simona and Brigida, of her sin and its result? Certainly not, else the secret would have leaked out, and not a single soul in Prato, with the exception of Fra Filippo, Spinetta and Maddalena, knew that Lucrezia was the mother of a baby until Filippino was more than three years old. Even the grocer's wife who lived opposite thought that it was Spinetta who was the erring one.

Did Lucrezia tell the abbess? Almost certainly yes, else she would have been a very deceitful and dishonest girl. But the abbess kept her secret, telling no one but the bishop in the strictest confidence.

When she told the abbess of her sin, did Lucrezia mention the name of Fra Filippo as the father of her baby? No. For, as we all know, any loyal girl will shield her lover as much as possible, even at considerable cost to herself; and, if she be both loyal and conscientious, and if the man has most truly repented, she will certainly redouble her effort that she should not betray him. Certainly no one, except possibly the grocer's wife, seemed to have connected Fra Filippo during his life at Prato with any serious scandal; and, when his sin was at last laid bare through an anonymous accusation, the

ecclesiastical authorities treated the friar with exemplary firmness and severity.

So, having passed the year in admirable discretion and self-restraint, one morning in the early winter Fra Filippo went over to say his Mass at Santa Margherita, stopping on afterwards to put the finishing touches to his predella, whilst Lucrezia had an interview with the abbess.

Since he knew what Lucrezia was doing, the friar's heart beat like a sledge-hammer as he painted. Presently the abbess came into the painting-room.

"Do you remember Sister Lucrezia, padre?" asked the abbess.

"Yes," answered Fra Filippo, swallowing hard. "From the time that she posed for the Madonna of the Girdle, I remember her very well."

The abbess seated herself and began to talk confidentially. "I never thought that a very wise proceeding on the part of my dear sister," said she. "For a nun to pose as a model might easily have set people talking, whilst it might have offended and shocked the older nuns. Certainly"—and she smiled—"it set the late prioress off on her wild vendetta. Sometimes I thought, especially during the last two years of her life, my sister let her heart run away with her prudence.

"Well," she went on, "Sister Lucrezia has just seen me and started negotiations for her return."

"Are you going to take her back?" asked Fra Filippo, with very mixed emotions.

"Certainly, as far as I am concerned," replied the abbess. "For, although she was the first one to start the exodus, I have always thought that the

prioress treated her with too great severity, and she is a very sweet and good girl by her disposition. Of course I shall have to get leave from the bishop first."

"Is there likely to be any difficulty with his lordship?" asked Fra Filippo, the natural man in him hoping against hope that there might be an insurmountable difficulty.

"I do not think so," answered the abbess. "Certainly the bishop is raising no difficulties with the other four nuns who have petitioned to return; but he must consider each case on its own merits, and, possibly, he may consider the case of Sister Lucrezia a little different from those of the rest."

"How was her case different?" asked Fra Filippo rashly, determined to find out how much the mother abbess would reveal.

"You see, she was the first to set the example of breaking enclosure," said she, and not another word of information did she give him even though he was the convent chaplain and a great favorite of hers.

"But, if Sister Lucrezia does return," said the abbess, smiling kindly, "she does not again pose as model for you or any other painter." And she rose and left the room.

Then was Fra Filippo absolutely certain that the lady abbess had no suspicion of his share in the scandal; and, since it would make it much more serious for Lucrezia if it were known that her lover had been in holy orders, he was devoutly thankful.

As soon as he had finished dinner, Fra Filippo went over to the house in the Via delle Tre Gore

to see Lucrezia, intending to tell her of what the abbess had said to him and to ask her what had been said to her. But, since he found the girl bending over her baby in a flood of tears, and since she begged him to go, and since he knew that it would be too dangerous for him to attempt to comfort her, Fra Filippo gave up any thought of trying to soothe his dear one for the present, and he hurried back to his own home where he went through a purgatory of his own thoughts and regrets.

The next morning the sun shone and the breeze blew mildly, and Fra Filippo found Lucrezia bearing her troubles bravely and with resignation.

"You will take great, great care of my bambino, Filippo?" she asked, knowing well that he would.

Fra Filippo nodded, for he could not trust himself to speak.

"And you will see me as often as is wise, if only for a minute, and tell me exactly how he is going on?"

"I will tell you the whole truth and all the truth, little one," he answered thickly.

"And what do you intend to do with him?"

They had talked over this matter often enough; but now the friar had an item of news to add. "I heard from *Il Botticello* last night," he told her, "and he is sending Sandro over to me next week. Of course the boy will live with me at the house in the Piazza del Mercatale for the present. But, when—when—you go back to the convent, I shall live here in this house and I shall take Sandro to live with me. He is a thoroughly nice lad and well brought up, and Maddalena, Filippino, he and I will make a happy little family."

"Eh? Three artists in one house?—the big artist, the little artist and the tiny artist! Truly it will be a regular college of artists."

So the two months wore on, Lucrezia showing the brightest side of herself to Fra Filippo and keeping her darker thoughts secret, whilst Fra Filippo became anything but a joyous friar; and, at the end of December, Lucrezia, Spinetta and the other three nuns entered into their second novitiate.

III

The year 1459 passed most peacefully; Lucrezia returning to the religious life with a sincere repentance and an earnest desire to make as full a reparation to Almighty God as lay in her power; Fra Filippo, besides painting four lunettes for the tomb which Messer Geminiano Inghirami was planning for himself, carrying on his work as chaplain prudently and well; and Filippino growing up into a strong and healthy boy.

Of course Lucrezia was as perfectly free to leave the religious life during her second novitiate as she had been during her first novitiate; but she remained firm in her good resolution and tried to the utmost of her power to make reparation for her great sin.

It is both illogical and uncharitable to ascribe unworthy motives to her, and to suggest, as a recent writer has done, that she must have found life with the thriftless and improvident friar a constant hardship, that she must have found her "shameful position" a constant humiliation, and that she must have sighed for "the peaceful, if somewhat monoto-

nous, retirement of her convent cell." For during the year before her return to the convent the friar was entirely free from financial troubles, and no one in the world of Prato, except Maddalena and Fra Filippo, even suspected her "shameful position." No, the only motives that could have swayed Lucrezia were the desire to return to God in the religious life and to show her sorrow for her sin.

IV

On the twenty-third of December, 1459, Lucrezia de' Buti, Spinetta de' Buti, Piera di Vanni Sensi, Simona di Michele Lottieri and Brigida d' Antonio Peruzzi solemnly renewed their religious vows in the presence of Donato de' Medici, Bishop of Pistoja, Ottaviano Guasconi, Abbot of Santa Maria di Grignano and Vicar-General of Prato, and the Abbess Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi.

Of course the chaplain and the other nuns must have been also present, but these three were the official witnesses as the document that was drawn up by the notary, Ser Dietajuti Spighi da Prato, bears testimony.

Lucrezia had made what reparation she could.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ACCUSATION

I

IF, before he had returned to his post as chaplain of Santa Margherita, Fra Filippo had consulted the priest who had heard the confession of his sin with Lucrezia, the priest would have certainly done all that was in his power to prevent Fra Filippo's action; but the lips of the old priest were closed by the seal of the confessional and he could do nothing. If the friar had consulted either the Bishop of Pistoja or the Prior of the Carmelites, disclosing the fact that he had been in guilty intercourse with one of the nuns, he would have been forbidden to resume his duties. But, as is obvious, he told no one who had any power to prevent the rash act. For, although a scandalous sin may conceal itself for a time until it seems as safe from observation as an underground river, eventually it will meet some obstacle which will throw it up to the surface for all to see.

As we have already remarked, the year of Lucrezia's second novitiate had passed admirably; the following year, during which Messer Geminiano Inghirami had retired from the office of *proposto* and Messer Carlo de' Medici had been appointed in his stead and during which the friar had painted two most excellent panels for the Church of San Domingo, had passed equally admirably, and it

really looked as though Fra Filippo's higher love for Lucrezia was "searing mere passion into lifeless dust."

The spring of 1461 was opening with the promise of a similar prosperity, and the five years' tragedy which had followed Lucrezia's flight from her convent seemed to be settling down into a lifetime of peace, when the unexpected happened through a most unexpected cause.

If only Maria di Matteo, the grocer's wife, had not seen Spinetta, Fra Filippo and the baby as the two former admired the latter at the window of the house in the Via delle Tre Gore; if only Ser Piero, in his post of Procurator for the Convent of Santa Margherita, had not been compelled to reject a most unsatisfactory consignment of groceries which Antonio di Matteo had supplied to the convent; if Ser Piero had refrained from sending off the grocer with a most irritating flea in his ear; then it is highly probable that the story of the sin and its repentance would never have leaked out, and that Fra Filippo would have died as a fairly respectable friar and Lucrezia as a most respected nun.

II

Now Antonio di Matteo had attended the public veneration of our Lady's Girdle on several recent occasions. He had heard a whisper about the five nuns who had run off into the world and had returned to their cloister; and he had recognized two of the five as the two ladies who had lately lodged at the house that was opposite his shop. So he put two and two together, came to the conclusion that

the gay Fra Filippo, who had been accustomed to spend his evenings at the Inn of the Girdle, had abducted Spinetta de' Buti, and, when Ser Piero had told him that his conduct towards the nuns of Santa Margherita was that of a wolf in a grocer's apron ravaging defenseless women, he resolved to bring a similar charge against the notary-procurator. He had a bitter sense of humor had Antonio di Matteo.

Armed with a quill and an ink-horn, fortifying himself with a flask of Chianti and a goblet, Antonio proceeded to put down his charge on a sheet of parchment, sipping the wine as he wrote.

Addressing the epistle to the "Officials of the Night and of the Monasteries of the city of Florence"—a body of discreet men who were appointed by the State of Florence to deal with the morals of Florence and the neighboring towns—and dating the document "VIII day of May, 1461," he wrote (and the original document is in the State Archives of Florence to this day):

"Unto you Officers of the Night and Monasteries of the city of Florence [he wrote] *it is notified that Ser Piero d'Antonio di Ser Vannozzo of the Gate of the Santa Trinita at Prato has frequented, and continues to frequent, the Monastery of Santa Margherita at Prato, and that about two months ago the said Ser Piero begot a male child in the said Monastery. And he sent the child at night time out of the town through a secret opening in the wall to Pietriccio, and next morning had it brought to Prato to be baptised: and this is known to many persons in Prato. And if you wish to find him, you will find him every day in the Monastery."*

He paused, filled his glass, and read what he had written. Then he frowned, for his charge against Ser Piero did not read as very convincing.

"This is known to many persons in Prato," for instance, was too vague to carry much weight; and, although the sentence, "if you wish to find him" (Ser Piero) "you will find him every day in the Monastery," was true, it meant nothing. Where else could one expect to learn the whereabouts of the man who executed the outside business of the convent except in the aforesaid convent, which he must visit daily to receive his instructions? But, if he were to join this uncertain and indefinite accusation against Ser Piero to a certain and definite accusation against Fra Filippo, which could be substantiated, perchance he might involve Ser Piero in the trouble.

Going to the door, he called his wife. "Maria," he called, "what was the Christian name of the girl whom we saw Fra Filippo embracing?"

"Spinetta," she called back.

"Excellent!" he called. "If you bring me another flask of the old Chianti in five minutes, I will show you something that may interest you."

Again he took up his pen, this time with the object of elaborating the last sentence, and wrote:

"And if you wish to find him, you will find him every day in the Monastery, together with another man called Frate Filippo: and the latter excuses himself by saying that he is the chaplain, while the former says that he is the procurator. And the said frate Filippo has had a male child by one called Spinetta. And he has in his house the said child, who is grown up and is called Filippino."

"'Spinetta!' 'Filippino!'" he muttered. "That will give the Officers of the Night some definite evidence to ponder." And he smiled to himself, thinking that Ser Piero might very well be caught into the vortex. "At any rate," he muttered, "it will show the Officers of the Night and Monasteries that the Convent of Santa Margherita, which complains of its respectable grocer, is a most disreputable place."

His wife entered the room, carrying the flask of old Chianti; and, whilst she read his epistle, he helped himself to the wine.

"But this is terrible," she cried. "For, not only have you invented an accusation against the morals of Ser Piero, for which you might be pardoned; but you have accused a holy nun of being the mother of his child."

"Read again, woman," he chuckled, with a smile that was vastly cunning. "See! I have accused no holy nun of being the mother of his child. The mother of his child might have been the woman who brings the convent milk, or the door-post, for all I have written."

Again she read the epistle through, and now she chuckled even as he had chuckled. "But you have not signed the letter, Antonio," said she.

"It is not the custom to sign anonymous accusations," he answered, grinning.

"Eh?" she queried.

"One writes down an anonymous charge," he explained, "being careful not to sign it. One journeys to Florence, where one has to buy groceries. One goes out under cover of the night. One goes to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. One goes

to the main entrance, where certain letter-boxes are placed. One drops the communication into the box that is marked *'Ufficiale di Notte e Monasterii,'* taking care that none is watching. Next day the box is taken to the Officers and, then, what happens happens. It is all very simple."

"It will take Ser Piero some trouble to disprove the charge," she chuckled. "That part about Fra Filippo would make any one believe the rest."

"One prays so!" he answered, devoutly.

III

Now the Tribunal of the Officers of the Night and Monasteries of Florence consisted of nine discreet and sober men who were elected by the Guilds of Florence to deal with the moral offenses in the State, and they had no cause to love the anonymous accusations, which were often inspired by personal spite and most terribly distorted. Yet, since this system of anonymous accusation was designed to enable private persons to draw attention to grave abuses without fear of consequences, the Officers of the Night could not disregard any complaint that was lodged.

Whether the Officers of the Night and Monasteries summoned Fra Filippo to appear before them in Florence, or whether they investigated the charge in Prato, we do not know. Whichever they did, whilst Fra Filippo must have denied the truth of the charge respecting Spinetta, he must have acknowledged the paternity of Filippino; also the Officers must have discovered that, if Spinetta was not the mother of the baby Filippino, then the other

girl who had lived for seventeen months in Fra Filippo's house was presumably the mother. Anyhow, we know for certain that the tribunal issued a decree which forbade Fra Filippo to enter again the Convent of Santa Margherita, and handed over the case to the ecclesiastical authorities who promptly deprived the friar of his chaplaincy.

How the town of Prato battened on the scandal, as only a small town will! And the grocer's wife was careful to feed the gossip with the gist of her husband's anonymous accusation, while Matteo the grocer saw that the decrees of the civil and ecclesiastical courts were known to all.

Then the pretty and impudent girls with whom the town of Prato abounded began to cast challenging glances at Fra Filippo as he went to and fro between his house and workshop. Young men talked in chattering groups, growing silent as the friar passed by. Married women raised their noses, sniffing disdainfully, and respectable men gave Fra Filippo a wide berth lest the pitch which besmirched his name should attach itself to their reputation.

"Living in this house," sobbed Maddalena, "no one will speak to me except the young men, and they call shameful things after me in the street." But her husband, Piero Bov'chiesi, went about his work untroubled. The summer lettuces were coming on splendidly.

The one bright spot in Fra Filippo's life was the loyalty of his own true friends. Fra Diamante became more and more devoted to him, in fact he became so devoted and stood up for him so bravely that, later on, the Superior of the Carmelites judged him to be involved in Fra Filippo's sin and impris-

oned him in Florence, and he was only released at the petition of the magistrates of Prato; Sandro Botticelli became his slave and, as Vasari tells us, "imitated the manner of his master so closely that Fra Filippo conceived a great love for him, and instructed him with so much effect that Sandro rapidly attained to a degree of art which no one would have expected from him"; and little Filippino became his constant shadow, continually making little drawings in imitation of his father's work.

IV

As June transformed itself into July, and July into August, the gossip grew worse and worse; for it had now leaked out that two of the fugitive nuns of Santa Margherita, Sister Spinetta and Sister Lucrezia de' Buti, had been living in Fra Filippo's house and under his protection during their flight from the convent; and, since he had denied under oath that Sister Spinetta was the mother of his baby, then, for certain, the mother must have been Sister Lucrezia, and this sin of sacrilege, added to the friar's own sin of infidelity to his vows, stirred the public indignation to the boiling point.

"But Fra Filippo and Madonna Lucrezia repented of their sin even before the bambino was born," cried Maddalena, wild with indignation. "And they confessed their sin; and God said: 'I forgive you. Go and sin no more!' And, from that moment, they lived the lives of two saints. Dare you condemn what God has forgiven?"

"So Maddalena acknowledges that this story is true!" scoffed one of her hearers to the others.

"She who has lived in the same house with them acknowledges that the story is true!" And that was all the good that her protest did.

Gradually the story crept into the convent, and Lucrezia's life became one long torture. Not only did the sister porteress draw her skirts aside most ostentatiously when she passed; but the other sisters, even those who had fled the convent with her, were deeply shocked and, although they did not taunt her with her sin, yet their faces grew grave and their manners constrained when she was with them. Of course the abbess had known all, or nearly all, about Sister Lucrezia's fall from virtue before she had returned to the convent; and, though she was kind and did her best to be kind, she felt that Lucrezia's concealment of the name of Fra Filippo had placed her as abbess in a hideously false position: to take back a nun who had sinned and repented was an act of holy charity; to take back a nun who had sinned with the convent chaplain and, at the same time, retain the services of that chaplain was an act of foolish indiscretion. In addition to all these hardships, ever since Fra Filippo had been forbidden to enter the convent, Lucrezia had lost all touch with her child, and, except once, when Maddalena had come to the convent trembling with fear, Maddalena had been too frightened to bring her the desired news. If it had not been for an occasional message sent through Fra Diamante, Filippino might have been dead and buried for all that Lucrezia knew to the contrary.

V

It was on a day early in August that Fra Diamante spoke out his mind.

That morning, on Diamante's return from saying Mass at the Convent of Santa Margherita, Fra Filippo had asked him how Lucrezia was bearing the scandal.

"She is looking very pale and very miserable," answered Diamante. "The other nuns look askance at her, and the abbess seems worried and irritable."

Fra Filippo sighed, for he was bitterly conscious that he could do nothing.

"What a fool you have been, Filippo," said Diamante. "To let a girl live in your house and to expect to go unscathed, was sufficiently foolish. But to allow the girl to return to her convent, while you continued to act as chaplain, was the very height of folly."

"I was no danger to her as long as she remained in the convent," grumbled Fra Filippo.

"Who talks of moral danger? Who hints at sin? You have been shriven and continue to say Mass, and, knowing you as I do, it is enough for me. But"—and he paused—"consider the full folly of it! If some one should learn the truth and whisper the truth, as some one has, a pretty pot of broth is set a-cooking. Sister Lucrezia is in the pot, and mother abbess is in the pot, and all the nuns are in the pot, and you are in the pot, and poor Ser Piero is in the pot, and all Prato sups off the dish."

"I did it for the best," sighed Fra Filippo.

"I don't believe that even yet you see what you

have done!" cried Fra Diamante. "All Prato is saying that the abbess knew that you had seduced one of her nuns and, condoning your act, allowed you to continue to frequent the convent as chaplain. Then that vile viper of an informer drags in Ser Piero, and all Prato now says that the Convent of Santa Margherita is a disreputable house and that the reek of it goes up to heaven. If only you had left Prato before Sister Lucrezia returned to the convent! No wonder the abbess looks irritable and worried."

Fra Filippo sat huddled up, his spirit utterly crushed.

"I was only thinking of Lucrezia," he moaned, "that she should have her child close to her and hear continually how he went on."

"Poor, poor Filippo," said Fra Diamante, putting his arm round his friend's shoulder.

"And now Lucrezia has no chance of happiness so long as she shall live," groaned Fra Filippo.

Then at last, towards the middle of the month, when the scandal had reached its height, Maddalena sought out Fra Filippo when he had come home for dinner, closing the door after her.

"Long ago, padre," she said, speaking very softly for fear of being overheard, "when you first brought Madonna Lucrezia to this house, I foresaw that you and she would love. Also I foresaw that, presently, you and she would fall into sad trouble. Also I foresaw that, when the trouble was at its very worst, the Medici would come riding by, saying: 'Cannot you trust the Medici to right a wrong?' "

"Heaven!" cried Fra Filippo. "The woman is

right! What with the Officers of the Night at Florence, and the magistrates here, and the people of Prato buzzing round like a swarm of hornets, I must have grown demented."

And, without giving Maddalena the chance to say another word, Fra Filippo drew the cowl over his head and rushed out of the house.

Possibly it was as well that he did not wait to hear the end of Maddalena's vision; since, if she had ended her wild day-dream, he might have lost all faith in her suggestion. For the most that he hoped for was that the *proposto* might manage to have Lucrezia removed to some distant convent where her sin would be unknown.

So, without more to-do, he sought out the new Proposto of Prato, Messer Carlo de' Medici, who had just returned from Rome.

CHAPTER XXIII

MESSER CARLO DE' MEDICI

I

CARLO DE' MEDICI, Protonotary Apostolic and Proposto of Prato, was a very scholarly and distinguished personage. A natural son of Cosimo de' Medici, by a youthful indiscretion with a lovely Greek slave for whom Cosimo had conceived a wild passion, he had inherited his father's suave and courteous manner together with his mother's physical beauty; and, beyond this, Cosimo, anxious to atone for his sin, had acknowledged him as his son and had caused him to be educated by the most learned and pious scholars of the time. Attached to the papal court as the registrar of the pontifical acts, he spent most of his time in Rome, attending to his duties in Prato chiefly through his vicar, Messer Paolo della Torricella.

On reaching the *proposto's* residence, Fra Filippo was shown into an anteroom where he was kept waiting for a few minutes while the *proposto* finished his dinner. Then the door opened and Carlo de' Medici entered the room. Strange to say, the friar was feeling singularly calm: it was just as though all his emotions had been burnt up during his interviews with Fra Diamante and Maddalena, and he had no emotion left.

"Eminence," he said, as he knelt on one knee to

kiss the prelate's ring, "I am Fra Filippo Lippi."

Carlo de' Medici raised him to his feet and embraced him. "Do you think that I have grown so scatter-brained that I forget my old friends?" he asked, smiling. "Do you think that I should forget the gay young artist whom Messer Cosimo locked in his room so that he might be compelled to finish his picture for Madonna his wife, and who cut his sheets into strips and, letting himself down from the window, went off merry-making?"

"Eminence," replied Fra Filippo, calmly, "I have come to you about a far more serious matter than the sins of my youth. I have come to consult you about the scandal with which all Prato is ringing."

"The sin between yourself and—I forget the lady's name?" asked the Medici, watching Fra Filippo keenly.

"Between myself and Sister Lucrezia de' Buti of the Convent of Santa Margherita," answered the friar, with cold desperation.

"Ah! I am glad that you have acknowledged the lady's name."

"I have shielded her name as long as I could; but now it is useless."

"And may I ask you in confidence whether you have truly repented and made all the reparation that is in your power?"

"Yes! And all I have done, blunderer that I am, has but served to make matters infinitely worse."

Messer Carlo de' Medici drew a breath of relief; for the friar's straightforward acknowledgment made it comparatively easy for him to try and rectify the stupid blundering.

"Canon Spighi and my vicar, Paolo della Terri-

cella, are dining with me," he explained, "and, when you were announced, we were busy discussing your affairs. Will you join us over a glass of wine and throw what light you can on the matter? You will find the canon and my vicar not unfavorable to you."

Muttering his gratitude, Fra Filippo followed the *proposto* into his dining-room.

II

The dining-room was distinguished by that austere luxury which marked the best ecclesiastical circles of that time—that is to say that, although the walls were adorned with only some religious pictures and a crucifix, and although the chairs were somewhat hard and uncomfortable, the table-linen was fine, the wine-glasses clear Venetian glass of the most graceful shape and the wine itself unexceptionable.

"Great evils demand strong remedies, padre," remarked the Medici, as he filled a wine-glass for Fra Filippo. "And we thought that your case was sufficiently grave to merit one of the last flasks of old Falernian, a gift from the papal cellars, which I had by me. May I tell Canon Spighi and my vicar what you, just now, have told me in confidence? It will make things clear."

"Certainly, eminence," muttered Fra Filippo, sipping his wine from sheer force of habit.

"Gentlemen," said Carlo de' Medici, looking at the others, "Fra Filippo assures me that he has repented, making the best reparation for the past that occurred to him; but that everything which he

has done has miscarried, causing the present scandal. Also, he owns that the lady is the nun of whom we were speaking."

"Sister Lucrezia de' Buti?" asked Canon Spighi.

"Yes," answered Messer Carlo.

Then they began to discuss the scandal in all its bearings, coming to much the same conclusions as those which Fra Diamante had arrived at, and deciding that (a) the root of the scandal did not lie in the original fault of Fra Filippo and Lucrezia, which had been truly repented of and which consequently deserved the pity, rather than the condemnation, of all honest men; (b) nor did it lie in the natural desire of the father to keep in touch with the mother so that he might keep her informed of the welfare of the infant, for this was but the natural impulse of human nature; (c) but it lay in the mistaken reticence of the couple which kept the abbess in ignorance of Fra Filippo's share in the sin, thus allowing her to continue to employ him as chaplain of the community.

Like Diamante, Canon Spighi summed up: "As things have gone, the continuance of Fra Filippo in the office of chaplain of Santa Margherita has made the people of Prato believe that the abbess has condoned his sin with one of her nuns, paving the way for the accusation against Ser Piero, and making the convent appear to be a very hotbed of moral depravity."

"Then what do you advise, canon?" asked Messer Carlo.

"That you should use your influence with Rome to have Sister Lucrezia transferred to an Augustinian convent at one end of Italy, and that Messer

Cosimo should use his influence to find work for Fra Filippo at the other end of Italy."

But Messer Torricella shook his head. "Our Florentine merchants," he argued, "travel widely, visiting every city. If you have Sister Lucrezia sent to a distant city, some one is sure to visit that same city, carrying the story. In the same way, no painter who is so famous as Fra Filippo can hope to hide his light under a bushel."

"Like the canon," said Messer Carlo, with admirable tact, "I think that both my father and myself should use our influence to right this matter. But, like the vicar, I think that any attempted concealment of Fra Filippo and Sister Lucrezia in distant cities would be useless."

"Could not you find some reasonable excuse which would absent you for a season from Prato, Fra Filippo?" asked Canon Spighi, looking at the friar. "Since every time that men see you walking to and fro from your workshop, it sets tongues a-wagging. Whereas, if you were absent for a season with good excuse, the scandal would fade away through inanition."

"An excellent idea!" chimed in the *proposto*.

"I had undertaken to value the frescoes which Bonfigli has just finished for the Signoria of Perugia," said Fra Filippo, "fixing the price that is to be paid to the artist. Fra Angelico, Domenico Veneziano and I were to make the valuation; but Angelico and Domenico are dead, and I only alive. I had thought to cry off on account of the scandal; but, if you think it wise, excellency, I will start for Perugia to-morrow."

"Then start to-morrow, padre, or to-day if pos-

sible," said the Medici. "And, if I have anything to communicate, I will let you know." He paused. "Make your address known to Messer Cosimo's agent in Perugia, and tarry in Perugia until you hear from me. Perchance I may have something to communicate."

So, after bidding farewell to the *proposto,* a farewell that was full of gratitude, Fra Filippo went off to make his preparations for the journey and the three ecclesiastics were left alone.

III

"After your hint of communications with Fra Filippo, have you anything to communicate to us, Messer Carlo?" asked the canon, who was somewhat inquisitive.

"I agree with Paolo Torricella," replied the Medici, "that it would be useless to send one of the guilty parties to a place in the north of Italy, and the other to the south; for some one would be certain to carry the story to every town in the country. Besides, that would not restore the reputation of the Convent of Santa Margherita."

"Yes, eminence!" replied Canon Spighi, impatiently.

"But, if I approached the Pope, and, backed up by my father, Cosimo, stated the case of Fra Filippo to his Holiness, then we should get the wisest and tenderest ruling that is possible on the matter."

"His Holiness is certainly most wise and kindly," replied the canon; "but what can he advise? He can only remove Sister Lucrezia to another convent, or keep her here."

Carlo de' Medici smiled shrewdly.

"You have a plan, excellence?" asked Torricella.

"If I have aught to suggest, I cannot even whisper it to you, my friends," replied the Medici, "before I have consulted Messer Cosimo. By the way, do either of you happen to know this Sister Lucrezia?"

Both the others answered in the affirmative.

"What is she like?" he asked.

"She has always struck me as a very good and modest girl," replied the canon.

"She is very sweet and charming, with all the culture of an educated Florentine lady," replied the vicar.

"A modest and cultured lady?" mused the Medici. "That will strengthen my hand if I should chance to consult his Holiness. As for Fra Filippo, he is the same as ever, always warm-hearted—rather too warm-hearted in this case—always impetuous, always rash and never by any chance discreet. At any rate, Almighty God could never say to Fra Filippo: *'Quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo.'* Also he is a man of great genius, and that counts for much with Pope Pius.

"And now, Paolo," said Messer Carlo, turning to his vicar, "I will look through those papers which you have got ready for my signature, for I must get back to Rome as soon as may be."

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM PERUGIA TO PRATO

I

ON the fourth of September Fra Filippo had completed his valuation of Bonfigli's frescoes and had handed the same valuation to the Signoria of Perugia. A week longer he lingered on and yet another week, the days a weariness of waiting, the nights spent in longing for the communication which Carlo de' Medici had virtually promised. He had no rest in the beauty of the country round him, backed by the Apennines, softened by the olive-groves and punctuated by the clear-cut cypress. He had no comfort in the noble buildings, in the lofty walls, in the Gothic carvings of Pissano, for he was restlessly waiting. Then the cruelty of Perugia got hold of him, the sense of the cruelty in her numerous religious revivals which were like no other revivals that the world has ever seen, the open cruelty of her numberless rebellions and fights and bloodsheddings, and the waiting became a positive torture; and he felt that, even in her softest moods, the sweetness of Perugia was like the sweetness of a purring cat, her claws ever ready to scratch and rend.

Then, at last, when he could scarcely bear Perugia any longer, the Medici's agent sought him out. "Fra Filippo," he said stiffly, the business man apparent in his manner, "you must sign a re-

ceipt for the safe delivery of this letter so that I may be relieved of my responsibility, for it has been expressed at a considerable expense from Rome."

Fra Filippo tore open the letter, glanced at it, signed the receipt, and the Medici agent left him.

For a moment the letters swam before his eyes; but, presently, as his eyes recovered their power, he sat down and read through the communication slowly, taking in the direction that he must repair without delay to the Casa Medici in Florence where full instructions would await him, and drinking in the assurance that his friends had been working on his behalf with much success.

"Messer Cosimo, himself [the letter went on], *will communicate the good news to you, which you will find to be better than the fondest imagination could have anticipated* [and the letter was signed] *by, Carlo de' Medici, Protonotary Apostolic.*

Then, without a moment's delay, Fra Filippo mounted the lusty mule which he had bought for the journey and shook the bloody dust of Perugia from his feet.

II

To Cortona he rode, the weariness of waiting giving place to the fever of anticipation. At Cortona he had meat and wine. Then onward, with the intention of reaching Arezzo before the gates were closed. But—the fever of anticipation giving way to the weariness of his tired body—he was forced to rest the night at Castiglione Fiorentino where he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

At daylight he arose, his body one big ache, and,

as soon as he had drunk a sup of wine and munched a piece of bread, he set out for Florence. But, ere the sun had reached its height, all the exciting anticipation which had carried him through the previous day had vanished, and he became plunged in the deepest despair. Unfortunately Maddalena had never finished telling him her day-dream, so his imagination could not picture the Pope riding by, dispensing Lucrezia and himself from their vows and binding them together in the freedom of most holy matrimony; for his artistic imagination never ran into the realms of pure fancy and, of himself, he could never have thought of the idea. And, gradually, as the day went on and his body grew more and more weary, he began to picture awful things—himself banished to the silence of a Carthusian Monastery and Lucrezia immured as a Poor Clare, which would certainly have ended the scandal. Also the forced journey was doing his rupture no good and it began to cause him considerable agony.

Thus he passed through Arezzo as through a bad dream, and, by the time he had reached Montevarchi, the dream had developed into a perfect nightmare. But, mercifully, during the next eight miles which carried him on to Figlione, his mind and body had both become too numb to suffer. At Figlione, having spent some twelve hours in the saddle during the day, he lay the night in a state that was without thoughts and without feeling.

But, strange to say, the next morning, the prospect of seeing the Medici and of having his fate and the fate of Lucrezia settled one way or the other put new life into him, and he reached Flor-

ence at about three hours after noon in a better state than could reasonably have been expected.

He drew up at the Medici palace and a porter came out to him. Yes! Messer Cosimo de' Medici was expecting him and he would see him at once. But, first, would not Fra Filippo wash the dust of travel from his throat whilst his eminence was informed of his arrival?

"I will not tarry for wine!" cried the friar. "I will see him at once!"

III

Cosimo de' Medici entered the room—it was a small room furnished with perfect simplicity—and, when Fra Filippo rose to greet him, he embraced the friar with great affection, bidding the lackey bring refreshment; for, as he said: "Meat or Mass hindereth no man's business."

In the year 1461 Cosimo de' Medici, *Pater Patriæ,* was seventy-two years old and tall and dignified in appearance. He was by far the richest man in Europe and, at the same time, the most simple, and his kindness, loyalty and generosity were beyond dispute.

As the servant left the room to fetch food and wine, Cosimo again embraced the friar.

"Have you forgotten, Filippo," he said, "how you, a young man of twenty-seven, followed me into my banishment at Padua? If you have forgotten, I have not!"

Fra Filippo had not forgotten, nor had he forgotten the "Coronation of our Lady" which he had painted for the Church of Saint Anthony during his stay in Padua.

"You escaped a great risk, eminence," he said, "by your flight from Florence."

"At the cost of nearly two thousand florins," answered the Medici, dryly. "If that fool Bernardo Guadagui had but realized his chance, I would gladly have paid ten thousand golden florins to have escaped from so great a danger."

The lackey returned with food and wine.

"Now," said Cosimo, "eat a morsel of food and drink a glass of wine whilst I tell you what we have achieved on your behalf.

"The day after you had set out for Perugia," he went on, "Messer Carlo visited me, telling me the whole story of yourself and Lucrezia de' Buti. And he proposed that he should see Pope Pius, laying the whole matter before him while he made a suggestion which I most heartily endorsed."

Cosimo looked at the friar's plate. "But you are eating nothing!" he said.

"I am too anxious to eat, eminence," stammered Fra Filippo.

"Well," went on Cosimo, "his Holiness heard Carlo kindly and was moved to great compassion. And he said: 'Both for the sake of Fra Filippo, who is a man of God-sent talent, and for the sake of Sister Lucrezia who, as you tell me, is a woman of modesty and refinement, and most of all for the sake of my Convent of Santa Margherita, I desire that this scandal should cease. Therefore I dispense the couple from their religious vows so that they may be united as man and wife. See that you draw up the dispensation, Carlo, and bring it to me for my signature."

And Cosimo, producing a sheet of parchment,

sealed with the Papal Arms and signed with the Pope's signature, handed it to the friar.

Fra Filippo clutched at the parchment as a drowning man would clutch at a straw. "How—can—I thank—" he stammered, and then as he thought of Lucrezia his voice failed him.

"Go on with your meal," said Cosimo, "whilst I tell you more."

But Fra Filippo, though he gulped down a glass of wine, could not eat. The food would have choked him.

"But it has never happened—can never happen," gasped Fra Filippo. "A friar and a nun—dispensed from their vows! It is impossible!" And he blinked like an owl.

"But it has happened," said the Medici, firmly. "Listen to me! The Pope has dispensed you from your vows so that you and Lucrezia may be united as man and wife."

"Then we are no longer friar and nun!" cried Fra Filippo. "And we are free to marry!"

The Medici shrugged his shoulders. "So far as I can see," he asserted, "you are already married—that is to say as far as the Church can marry you. Of course, if you and Madonna Lucrezia, one going one way and the other going the other way, refused to consummate your marriage, you would not be married even though the Pope and all the College of Cardinals took part in the ecclesiastical ceremony."

Fra Filippo, finding the Papal dispensation still hard to believe, muttered something.

"As you know," explained Cosimo de' Medici, as though he were talking to a child, "you and Lu-

crezia de' Buti are the ministers of your own marriage. You and she plight your vows of lifelong fidelity; the Church witnesses your vows and gives her blessing; then you lead your bride back to your own home and complete the marriage. If you were living *in partibus infidelium* and could get no priest, your vows and living together would effect the sacrament even though there were no priest to bless you." He repeated his point. "You have received the dispensation; his Holiness has given you his blessing; now you need only to pledge your vows of fidelity and lead your wife home."

"But, eminence," cried Fra Filippo, "we made vows of life-long fidelity when we first knew that our baby was expected."

The Medici wrinkled his forehead. "Then, I suppose," he said, "that you have merely to wrest your wife from mother abbess and to live together as man and wife."

"I will be married by Canon Spighi in the *pieve!*" cried Fra Filippo, carried away by his longing to be married as regularly as possible.

"And you would at once start the people of Prato talking? Remember that his Holiness desires that the scandal should cease entirely!"

Fra Filippo looked disappointed, and Cosimo saw his disappointment.

"But, if you ask some discreet priest," he suggested, "my son's vicar, for instance, to come to your house and to give his blessing on the union, transforming the nun's ring into a wedding-ring and endowing the bride with the gold and silver which I shall bestow on you for the purpose, there could be no objection."

"But how do you know so much of the theology of the sacrament of matrimony, excellence?" asked the friar, marveling.

"I have learnt much from Carlo respecting your case," answered the Medici, smiling. "I have received very full instruction—almost too full instruction." So he had.

"Now go and rest, my Filippo," said Cosimo, "and to-morrow you shall set out for Prato, where my son, Carlo, has bidden Paolo della Torricella to meet you so that he may see you through any difficulties that might occur."

"Cannot you trust the Medici to right your wrongs?" murmured Fra Filippo, remembering Maddalena's vision.

So that night the friar slept in a comfortable bed; and, early next morning, Messer Filippo Lippi, dressed in a suit of fine Florentine cloth, carrying a bag of golden florins which Cosimo had given him as his marriage present, and armed with the Papal brief, set out for Prato. The sun was shining and his weariness was forgotten.

CHAPTER XXV

MAN AND WIFE

I

NEXT morning, as we have already seen, so soon as the day had begun to dawn, Fra Filippo rose, dressed himself in a suit of good Florentine cloth such as scholars and poets were accustomed to wear, swallowed a hurried breakfast of bread, grapes and wine, and allowed Cosimo de' Medici's servant to trim his hair; for, since he had set out for Perugia, he had allowed his tonsure to grow, and by now, as soon as it had been trimmed, his head was that of an ordinary layman. Then he bade a warm farewell to Cosimo, attached the gift of a heavy bag of florins to his saddle and started for Prato.

As he set out, the sun was shining kindly and a soft breeze was stealing up the Valley of the Arno. Some boys were playing in the Market-place and, since they were playing with the prospect of the morning's school hanging over their heads, Fra Filippo felt himself in tune with their games. He had yet to face the Lady Abbess, Messer Torricella and all the people of Prato.

But, as he reached the country, the morning mists were wafted away and his spirits began to rise. The song of Sigismondo Malatesta came into his head and he sang:—

"O beautiful thrushes, that flit and that flutter
Through the green branches, singing delightfully,
Voice me the grief that my lips cannot utter.
Fly to her bed at the dawn, and perch lightfully
High on the head of her bedstead, and, singing there
Pierce her hard heart that she act not despitefully."

But, since his voice this morning was more remarkable for its strength than for its sweetness, the little birds, instead of joining with his song or doing what they were bidden, flew away in terror.

And all the way to Prato Fra Filippo rode slowly and cautiously; for, on this the day of his life, he could not have his rupture torturing him. And altogether, as he approached Prato, he was in a very collected and resolute state of mind. There was much to be done before he could claim his bride.

II

Reaching Prato, Fra Filippo stopped at his house in the Via delle Tre Gore. Fortunately Maddalena was out doing her marketing and Piero Bov'chiesi answered his call; so, telling him to come over to the convent and take the mule, the friar also bade him inform Maddalena of his arrival so that she might dress Filippino in his best clothes and prepare an ample dinner.

"The autumn vegetables are coming on well, padre," said Piero Bov'chiesi.

Fra Filippo knocked at the convent door, firmly and as one having authority.

The porteress, late prioress, opened the shutter that closed the grating which was used for inspection and looked out.

"I must see the abbess immediately," said Fra Filippo.

"It is not allowed!" cried the porteress. "You must not enter the convent, neither must you hold any intercourse with mother abbess nor with any of the nuns." And she slammed to the shutter in the most determined manner.

Fra Filippo was taken aback. He could not thunder at the door, rousing the neighborhood and creating fresh scandal. Then he remembered that Messer Torricella had been instructed to see him through all his difficulties, and he rode on to the *proposto's* residence.

Messer Carlo de' Medici's vicar was awaiting him and listened to his rebuff with grim amusement. "Fra Filippo—or, since I must give you your proper title, Messer Filippo—I was expecting this," he chuckled. "For, as you know, the nuns of Santa Margherita had strict instructions to refuse you admittance."

"As Fra Filippo I have lived," replied the friar; "as Fra Filippo I have painted; as Fra Filippo I shall die. The devil fly away with your 'Messer!' "

"Then, Fra Filippo, I will get my cloak, together with a letter from the *proposto,* and accompany you to the convent. I presume that you have the Papal brief with you?"

"Yes!" cried the friar. "And hurry, man, for I am dying with anxiety!"

So Fra Filippo and Messer Paolo della Torricella made their way to the Convent of Santa Margherita, the vicar talking quickly as they went. Messer Carlo had written a letter to clear away all difficulties, and Fra Filippo, as soon as he went

to his house, would find that all was prepared ready for his home-coming.

III

Again Fra Filippo stood before the convent door; but, this time, it was the vicar who knocked, and, as soon as the porteress had opened the shutter of the grille, it was the vicar who spoke.

"Mother Porteress," he said, "I have a letter from the Proposto of Prato, authorizing and instructing the abbess to grant Fra Filippo an interview."

The porteress hurried off to give this message and, returning, threw open the door and led the way into the guest-room. In a couple of minutes the abbess came to them.

Bowing graciously to Messer Paolo and a little stiffly to Fra Filippo, the abbess turned to the porteress, who was lingering in the background.

"You may go, dear mother," she said, and she looked at the vicar.

"Mother abbess," said Paolo della Torricella, "be prepared for a shock!" And he motioned to Fra Filippo to produce his brief.

The abbess read through the document. Again she read it, weighing every word.

"But this is incredible!" she cried. "How do I know that some ingenious person has not forged it?" And she glanced at Fra Filippo suspiciously.

"You know the *proposto's* signature," answered his vicar, handing her a letter from Messer Carlo de' Medici.

She read it carefully, finding that Messer Carlo, foreseeing that the Papal brief might be met with

some incredulity, had guaranteed that he himself had engrossed the document and had seen the Pope sign it.

The abbess sat down quickly, for her world was falling about her ears and she was feeling a little faint.

"Mother abbess," said the vicar, gently, "when the *proposto* was last here in Prato, he saw the terrible scandal that was stirring the town, and he saw the terrible injury that this same scandal was doing to your convent."

"Yes," murmured the abbess.

"He also saw that, if Sister Lucrezia were to be transferred to another convent, the scandal would be sure to follow her while the harm that it had done to your convent would remain."

"That is true," murmured the abbess.

"So, as soon as he had reached Rome, Messer Carlo laid the matter before his Holiness; and his Holiness, desiring that the scandal should cease, dispensed Fra Filippo and Sister Lucrezia from their religious vows, making them man and wife."

Gradually, as the news was doled out bit by bit and the abbess took it in, her face brightened. "It was a very kindly and a very gracious act," she said.

"It was!" answered Torricella.

"And people will so wonder at this miraculous dispensation that they will forget to slander our poor convent."

"They will."

Then the abbess, full of her new-found happiness, turned to Fra Filippo. "You too have suffered," she said, softly.

And, for the first time since he had reentered

the convent, the friar spoke. "I am very sorry, mother abbess," he said. "I am sorry that I did not tell you of my guilt."

And, since the abbess could now afford to be generous, she looked at Fra Filippo kindly, noting his layman's dress. "When will you take Sister Lucrezia away from us?" she asked.

"Now," answered the friar, his throat dry.

"Yes! 'Tis best done quickly. Besides, if Lucrezia will accompany you, she no longer has any place within our walls." And, going to the door, she bade mother porteress summon Sister Lucrezia to the guest-room.

Shocked to her soul, the porteress went off to call Lucrezia.

IV

As Lucrezia entered the guest-room and saw Fra Filippo and the *proposto's* vicar in consultation with mother abbess, her heart stood still and she grew very pale; for the isolation of the past four months, with none but Spinetta standing by her and with Filippo and her baby beyond recall, had been more than human endurance could bear, and this seemed to be the end of all things. But the abbess was speaking while her lover was smiling at her.

"Lucrezia," said mother abbess, her voice piercing through the mist which seemed to envelop her, "Fra Filippo has some wonderful news from Rome. It will be glad news for you."

Lucrezia stood still, struggling to understand.

"His Holiness the Pope, having heard of all our trouble in Prato and anxious that the scandal should end, has loosed Fra Filippo and you from your re-

ligious vows and desires that you should come together as man and wife."

"God reward you, dear mother," murmured Lucrezia, uttering the nun's formula that covers the reception of a kindness as though she had been an automaton. But Fra Filippo was speaking, and his voice shattered the mist to rags.

"Will you come home with me, Lucrezia," he cried, holding out his hands, "as my wife and the mother of Filippino?"

With an inarticulate cry, the girl came to him as to a harbor of refuge and safety.

Then, since Lucrezia was sobbing her heart out, and Fra Filippo was speechless, and the abbess was incapable of action, Paolo della Torricella took charge. Telling the abbess that Sister Lucrezia had suitable clothes at home and bidding her find a cloak that would cover Lucrezia's habit and a shawl that would cover her head, he bundled the couple out of the convent, across the few steps that separated the Convent of Santa Margherita from the house where Lucrezia's baby had been born, and into the room where Maddalena was holding Filippino by the hand.

"My precious!" cried Lucrezia, and for a time she was lost to all the world except her son.

"Now, Fra Filippo," said Torricella, taking him by the arm, "if you do not know what is due to your marriage guests, I do." And, leading him into a room in which a feast had been prepared, he helped himself and the friar to wine. Of a truth, Messer Carlo de' Medici had chosen his vicar wisely, for he was a man who was competent to deal with each occasion as it arose.

V

Whether the vows of mutual fidelity which Fra Filippo and Lucrezia had made when they were expecting the advent of their baby would suffice, seemed doubtful. Messer Cosimo seemed to think that they were sufficient; but then neither Cosimo nor Carlo de' Medici were experts on Canon Law. Himself, Paolo della Torricella considered that the original vows of celibacy which Fra Filippo and Madonna Lucrezia had taken, until these same vows had been dispensed by his Holiness, would make the subsequent vows of mutual fidelity *ultra vires* and consequently null and void.

But Fra Filippo and Lucrezia were desirous of renewing their vows of fidelity. Very well, let them renew their vows of lifelong fidelity to each other in the presence of himself, Maddalena and Piero Bov'chiesi, and he would bless the wedding-ring and give the Church's benediction on the couple.

"Besides," he said, smiling, "Fra Filippo must endow his bride with the gold and silver that Messer Cosimo has bestowed; for, if Madonna Lucrezia should once get hold of the money, there would be no risk of it taking to itself wings and flying away."

So straight off, before Fra Diamante or any one else could come into the house, Filippo Lippi and Lucrezia de' Buti were made man and wife as fast as the Church could bind them. Lucrezia was still wearing her nun's habit, covered by an ample cloak, but she had removed her veil and her cropped hair was now hidden by a lace mantilla. Then, at Lucrezia's suggestion, the vicar went, first to the convent so that he might tell the good news to Sister

Spinetta, and then to the Piazza del Mercatale, where he summoned Fra Diamante to the wedding feast.

When Messer Torricella returned, he found that the bride was now attired in one of the gowns which Cosimo de' Medici had ordered and which Maddalena, basing her measurements on the dresses that Lucrezia had left behind when she had gone back to Santa Margherita, had altered to an admirable fit; while Fra Filippo was clothed in the garb of a layman. And, although the bride looked almost too frail and ethereal for an earthly marriage and the bridegroom seemed much the worse for wear after his recent journeyings, and although the couple were consequently very quiet, Messer Torricella and Fra Diamante had sufficient spirits for the lot of them. Also Sandro Botticelli had drifted in for his dinner and, being made heartily welcome, had bestowed his whole boyish admiration on the person of Lucrezia.

"Master," he had whispered to Fra Filippo, "this is the sweet Madonna whom you have painted and whom I have dreamed of."

"She is, Sandro," had whispered back Fra Filippo.

"And I too shall paint her as the Madonna in my first masterpiece; for she is more like the Madonna of my dreams than is any woman that I have ever seen."

As for the wedding breakfast: Messer Cosimo had given carte blanche to Paolo della Torricella, who had acted as his agent in this matter, and Messer Paolo had shown sufficient sense to leave the ordering to Maddalena, so the roast peacock, gor-

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geous in its tail-feathers, and the boar's head which had its gaping mouth filled with a huge citron, and the dishes of quails and ortolans, and the perfect salad grown by Piero Bov'chiesi, to say nothing of the pastries from the light fingers of Maddalena and the autumn fruits in great profusion, made a feast worthy of Lucullus.

VI

The guests had left. Filippino had been put to bed. Fra Filippo and Lucrezia were alone.

"God has been very kind to us, Filippo," whispered Lucrezia as she snuggled up to her husband.

"My loved one! My loved one!" murmured Fra Filippo, crushing her to him.

CHAPTER XXVI

REST AFTER STRIFE

I

A MAN who is suffering from rupture cannot ride from Perugia to Florence in less than three days without paying for it afterwards. Therefore, during the late autumn of 1461 and the whole of the following year, Fra Filippo had to take life very easily.

This does not mean that the friar was lazy, as those cold-blooded fish the art-biographers would have it, nor does it mean that he was idle. His work-shop was in full swing; Fra Diamante, Jacopo del Sellajo and Sandro Botticelli were fully occupied; and the firm must have produced many of those commonplace pictures which bring in small profits and quick returns. But it does mean that, the master's mind and body being incapacitated, the output was of such ordinary *bottega* type that it had but little merit and less artistic value.

Again, the five years of Fra Filippo's sin and repentance, ending with the public disgrace of the Santa Margherita scandal, had produced an entire loss of self-respect and self-esteem in the friar's soul, and he required a long period of rest with the purpose of spiritual recuperation before he would again be ready to take up the rôle of creator; for the human mind is upset and distracted while mental trouble

is brewing and it requires time to recover its balance when the trouble is over, and whilst it is upset and whilst it is recovering its balance it is apt to be thrown out of artistic gear. At any rate, we find that Fra Filippo was unable to continue the *pieve* frescoes, from that time that he abducted Lucrezia until two years had elapsed since the time that the Papal dispensation set things right. He had done one half of the *pieve* frescoes before his sin had wrecked his power of creative work; then came the repentance and the scandal and he needed time to recover from the effects of these things before he would be able to resume the work of creator. All of which is proof conclusive that Fra Filippo was not the abandoned man that some have made him.

So, during the October and November of 1461 and half through December, he rested in the comfort of his home and basked in the sweetness of Lucrezia's smiles. Then came a shock.

II

Towards the end of December the Prior of the Carmine became troubled. Of course he had received notice of Fra Filippo's release from his authority, and he did, and could do, nothing except acquiesce. But now stories of Fra Diamante's championship of Fra Filippo had come through to Florence and he must assert himself for the sake of discipline. So, summoning Fra Diamante to Florence, he firmly and relentlessly put down his foot, imprisoning Diamante after the custom of the time until he should come to his right senses.

Diamante, conscious that he had done nothing more than play the part of loyal friend, must have

resented such treatment. The prior, imbued with the spirit of the true religious, must have pointed out that, by the concealment of Fra Filippo's sin, Diamante had participated in that sin, especially as in his case it was his duty to report the scandal to his superior. Diamante, who had lived in the world and away from his order since the time of his profession, would have attempted argument. The prior would have pointed out that Fra Diamante had no right to argue with his superior and that his duty was that of holy obedience. So Diamante was imprisoned until he came to his sense of religious obedience; and since, owing to his temperament, this was likely to be long delayed, Fra Filippo worked through Messer Torricella and Canon Spighi until they brought the matter before the magistrates of Prato. Anyhow, the magistrates petitioned the Archbishop of Florence for Fra Diamante's release from prison; and, on January 22nd, 1462, he was released.

Always inclined to be cross-grained and money-loving, Fra Diamante came back from the Carmine in a regular hedgehog of a temper, vowing that he would have done with the prior, would have done with the Carmine and would have nothing more to do with the whole of the Carmelite Order. And, since he had no hope of a Papal dispensation, and since a friar can only be transferred from his religious order to an order that is more strict, he applied to be transferred to the Camaldolese as an order which had a strong artistic tradition.

But in all of Diamante's fuming and fretting—at his best he was not an easy man to get on with—Fra Filippo, remembering his assistant's loyalty and devotion in the past, displayed the greatest patience

and tenderness. Nor was Lucrezia forgetful of all that Diamante had done for her in her trouble.

III

In the spring of 1462 Lucrezia and Fra Filippo had a serious talk about vocations.

"It seems ridiculous, Filippo," said Lucrezia, "to think of Fra Diamante, who, save for saying Mass at Santa Margherita, is wrapped up in his paintings and what paintings will bring, as a Camaldese Monk."

"It is ridiculous, sweet one," replied Fra Filippo, who had much time for serious thought of late, "to think of either Fra Diamante or myself as religious. As laymen, who went to Mass daily, we might have been none too bad; but as religious, who ought to be heart and soul in their religious life, we are absurd."

"And yet a good religious has time for other things."

"Aye! But with a painter, a painter must be wrapped up heart and soul in his paintings else he is no good. Therefore, when the painter-priest is saying his Mass he has distractions, and when he is saying his Office he is far away in his pictures."

"Yet, if he were a layman, he would suffer from distractions in his prayers."

"Yes! But that would be but a small matter; for who can escape distractions? With a priest, however, the case is different since it is a grievous sin if a priest allows his thoughts to wander while he is saying his Office."

"There was Fra Angelico."

"Fra Angelico lived in the cloister, and came out

of the cloister in obedience to paint his pictures. Fra Diamante and I lived in the world and painted for our livelihood. One cannot serve God and mammon."

"That is true," murmured Lucrezia, and there was silence.

"Filippo," said Lucrezia presently, "I never had a true vocation to become a nun."

Fra Filippo sat up and gasped.

"I had no chance of marriage like other girls; for my brother could not afford more than fifty florins as my dowry, and that is no dowry for marriage, so he sent me to Santa Margherita as a boarder. Then gradually I became sick to death of the tittle-tattle of the boarders' parlor, and, since I was a pious girl who loved the nuns dearly, I desired to be with the nuns. You see, my desire was to get away from the boarders' parlor rather than to give myself to our Lord. With Spinetta it was quite different."

"Where can a maiden who has no fitting dowry find refuge except in a convent?" sighed Fra Filippo. "She must either become a parlor-boarder or else a nun."

"And, if she is an educated maiden, the chatter of the boarders' parlor becomes unbearable. It is gossip and religion, gossip and religion from morning to night, and not a sensible sort of religious chatter either. Believe me, Filippo, I grew sick to death of hearing what Sister So-and-So thought, and what the chaplain thought, and what the boarders' relations thought."

"And what was it like in the novitiate?" asked the friar.

"The novitiate was a relief, and becoming a nun

was freedom. All the same I did not take my vows through a worthy motive. I had no true vocation. If I had, I would have borne with mother prioress."

"And now, dearest one," said Fra Filippo, softly, "are you happy in your real vocation?"

"Bah! Happy is no word for it. I am in heaven!"

"Even with an old cripple of a husband?"

"Shame, Filippo! I will not have you or any one speak against that poor man! He is the best and kindest and dearest husband in the whole of Italy!"

Then the conversation drifted into less personal topics, and Lucrezia told her husband that Maddalena was expecting her second baby.

The friar chuckled. "Will it be grown in the garden or born in bed?" he asked. "No! I have it: Piero will find the baby in his parsley-bed! It will be half a human being and half a vegetable."

But Lucrezia's thoughts had moved forward.

"Do you think that I shall soon have a second baby, Filippo? I should love one dearly."

"As soon as your husband is stronger, Lucrezia. He is growing stronger daily."

And here the friar spoke the truth. What with the past mental strain and the present physical strain, he had become incapable for a time of production either in the artistic or in the natural realm.

IV

A man of Fra Filippo's age takes a long time to recuperate and, during the years 1462 and 1463, although he became stronger and more active, he still lacked the initiative to start any great creative

work. He was happy, too happy and contented in his present life to bestir himself; and, what with Lucrezia's economy and Cosimo's generous wedding present, he was in no immediate need of money. Besides, during one of these years, Diamante must have been absent from Prato for the twelve months' novitiate that is required when a friar becomes a monk. In fact, so moribund did the firm of Lippi and Diamante appear that, on the 21st of November, 1463, the Magistrates of Prato met to consider how Fra Filippo could be made to complete the *pieve* frescoes. But, during this time, the friar was not idle, for he was building the foundation of a magnificent work that should live long after he was dead.

By the summer of 1463 Filippino was six years old and Sandro Botticelli was nineteen, and these two were of the material that any artist might long to model.

"Is not Filippino wonderful?" said Lucrezia to her husband. "In Filippino, my Filippo will have a second life."

"With all the skill and knowledge that his father has," replied Fra Filippo, "and with but half the fire."

"But he is so good, and so obedient, and so clever," urged the mother. "Why, he follows you in everything."

"Not in everything," chuckled the father. "For example, the lad would never carry a nun away from her convent, and then get the Holy Father to make them man and wife."

"For shame, Filippo!" cried the mother.

And again the father chuckled.

"You see, beloved," he explained, "if he is to be truly great, a painter must have something of a rebellious devil in his composition. Something that will make him break with the old rules which have governed painters hitherto, and start his own rules which shall govern himself. Filippino may become a second Fra Angelico, but he will never become a second Masaccio."

"That may be true," sighed Lucrezia.

"Now Sandro may become a great painter, far greater than I am."

"Sandro is a dear boy," said Lucrezia with enthusiasm.

"If he will only work at his drawing and color."

"He is too fond of play, if that is what you mean. Only this morning I found him standing where the echo from the *pieve* would carry his voice to the wine-shop across the piazza, while himself remained unseen, and mocking Ser Piero d'Antonio di Ser Vannozzo."

"What did he call?" asked Fra Filippo, smiling.

"'Piero di Prato,
Fior di granato!'"

"And what happened then?" asked the friar.

"Ser Piero came running out of the wine-shop with his face as rosy as a pomegranate. It was like a miracle play."

"That is true artist's work," chuckled Fra Filippo. "There was never yet a painter who did not delight in a jest of that sort." Then he grew serious.

"What I mean," he continued, "is that Sandro will draw in delightful line and with beautiful de-

sign without troubling to draw from the model. He will color in beautiful washes of transparent pigment, without troubling to get the true depth of the shadows and shading which lie on the model."

"Yet his work is very lovely and very full of imagination," said Lucrezia.

"Too lovely and too full of imagination," replied the friar. "For how can one paint a human body unless one knows the muscles that actuate that body, even in the fashioning of a smile? And how can one paint the body unless one knows the true depth of coloring that lurks even in the tiniest shadow?"

"Have you ever told him concerning the painting of a soul?" asked Lucrezia.

"No," replied Fra Filippo, thoughtfully.

"That it is the soul which fashions even the tiniest muscle of the body, and bestows all the body's coloring?"

"I had never thought to tell him that," replied the friar.

"Then I will tell him," cried Lucrezia. "For trying to paint the soul has helped you greatly."

"Do!" said Fra Filippo. "For you know more about the soul than ever I shall learn."

For a few minutes Lucrezia worked at the embroidery which she was fashioning, sewing with those fine, even stitches that make the Quattrocento embroidery a thing of joy. Then she spoke.

"I think that Sandro is finding his model very difficult," she said. "In fact, he told me that to draw the girl from the wine-shop whom you have engaged to pose to him as the Madonna is beyond his power. 'For,' said he, 'Lisa serving wine has a

merry smile and a changing expression, but Lisa as the Madonna is ridiculous.' "

"The model is always a difficulty," groaned Fra Filippo. "That is why I first wanted to draw you as our Lady."

"Now, if I tell him about drawing the soul of our Lady, while he is getting the shading and coloring from the wine-shop maid," continued Lucrezia, "Sandro can imagine the soul of our Lady in the drawing. Then, when he comes to the actual picture, he can forget all about Lisa the wine-shop girl and, working from the drawing which he has made, strive to perfect the image of our Lady from his imagination."

Fra Filippo thought for a moment. "That is an idea worth trying," he said. "For the control and direction of Sandro's vivid imagination is too difficult for me."

"Then I have your permission to try?"

"I tell you, my loved one," replied Fra Filippo, "that you may try what you will. If you can help me to make the boy toil with his whole heart and his whole skill instead of playing with his imagination, you will have achieved a miracle. The worst of it is that, within him, there is the making of the greatest artist of his age."

V

In the winter of 1463 and the spring of 1464 it seemed as though, his time of rest and recuperation having been fulfilled, the world was clamoring for Fra Filippo to come back to it. First the friar received a letter from Cosimo de' Medici telling him that the Commune of Spoleto, a city in Umbria

which had once been united to Tuscany, desired him to undertake the decoration of its cathedral and had asked Cosimo to use his influence with Fra Filippo to that effect. Then the magistrates of Prato were endeavoring to force the friar to return to his work on the *pieve* frescoes. But still Fra Filippo seemed incapable of making any great and sustained effort.

It was on April 1st of 1463 that Cosimo de' Medici died in his villa at Careggi. On April 6th Messer Paolo delle Torricella, who was now a close friend of Fra Filippo, came to see the friar on his return from his workshop.

"I have some news for you, my friend." he said.

"Good news or bad news?" asked Fra Filippo, helping himself and Torricella to wine.

"At any rate it is wholesome news," replied the vicar dryly.

"Then, if it be wholesome news, it must be bad news, for I am very well contented with things as they are now." And Fra Filippo sighed.

"When first the Pope gave you your dispensation, you were a very weary man and very sick. Now that you are strong and cheerful it is quite time that you got back to your work."

"I have no heart for work," sighed Fra Filippo. "I have lost all my power, all my skill, all my ambition."

"Then this news," said the vicar, "ought to give you back all your power, all your skill and all your ambition, Filippo." He spoke slowly so that his words might soak in. "This morning the four *probiviri* who have charge of the *pieve* frescoes met together, and they drafted a letter to Messer Carlo de' Medici saying that there was little hope of your

ever completing the frescoes in the choir unless you were forced thereto by the *proposto*. Messer Carlo sent me to give you a hint that he cannot ignore this letter, and that he will be forced to send you an official warning that you must finish the frescoes by next August else terrible things will happen to you."

Fra Filippo groaned.

"And," went on the vicar, "Messer Carlo asked me to remind you privately of the time when he, Canon Spighi and myself worked to get you the dispensation from your vows, and to ask you to paint the portraits of us three in memory of that day."

The friar's face brightened. "I had planned, as my chief fresco," he said, "the funeral of Saint Stephen."

"Yes," said the vicar.

"Shall I paint you three as the chief mourners beside the Saint?"

"Admirable!"

And they discussed the proposed fresco in all its points. Finally:—

"Can you finish the frescoes within a reasonable time?" asked the vicar.

"When I once get going," answered the friar. "I have been like a frightened boy beside a river, afraid to take the plunge. Now you have shoved me in."

"And that is exactly what Messer Carlo thought," said the vicar. "Now you are started, can you finish the frescoes within a reasonable time?"

"Why, certainly!" answered Fra Filippo, cheerfully.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PAINTER'S MASTERPIECE

I

IN the April of 1464 Fra Filippo started the cartoons of the Life of Saint Stephen—he was the Patron Saint of Prato—and, as soon as these were finished, commenced the frescoes themselves with more than his old vigor. What these frescoes were like when they were in their first freshness we cannot say, for time has treated them cruelly, partially obliterating two out of the three huge panels and dimming the lunette which surmounts them. Certainly the composition of the lunette is magnificent, and Vasari, who saw the panels when they were still fresh, tells us that the two which have since suffered most were the two that were the finest and most expressive. Also Baldanzi, who saw the frescoes immediately after they had been restored by Professor Marini a hundred years ago, maintains that if Fra Filippo had painted these pictures in Florence or Rome, instead of in a small provincial town, their fame would have outshone that of Masaccio's frescoes in the Carmine.

But we can still see for ourselves the third panel—the funeral of Saint Stephen—and for severe dignity of treatment, for reserve, for perfection of composition and for general artistic merit, this

panel has never been equaled in the history of fresco work. It was painted by a poor cripple of a man who had just been through a perfect purgatory of humiliation, and, what was more, it was painted in the days when art was young and therefore was entirely without precedent. Moreover, in all of these four frescoes of 1464-65, there is not a single portrait of Lucrezia which, considering the nature and extent of the recent scandal, shows admirable good taste on the part of Fra Filippo. When he came to the Spoleto frescoes, where the scene of the scandal was far away, he could not keep his beloved model out of his pictures.

As to Lucrezia, her husband's self-restraint, following on the Papal dispensation, seemed to have influenced the better in Prato in her favor, and the Bovacchiesi, the Lottieri and the Ciardi of Villa Tabule opened their doors to her.

"Are you going to ask Fra Filippo's wife to our house, my dear?" asked Messer Lottieri, much shocked. "Consider what people have been saying about her!"

"Do you wish me to resist the Pope's dispensation, my dear?" replied his wife. "Surely that is not the conduct of a good Christian! Besides I met the girl last week at the Casa Bovacchiesi, and she is so refined and modest. Madonna Bovacchiesi was delighted with her."

In the Villa Tabule, Messer Giovanni Ciardi also was talking to his wife. "That boy of Madonna Lucrezia is a fine, manly little fellow," he remarked. "He will make a good companion for our son."

"Yes, indeed," replied Madonna Ciardi; "for he is clever, well behaved and courteous. I wish that

Lucrezia had a daughter whom our little Ciardi might some day marry."

Messer Giovanni sank his voice to a whisper. "Fra Filippo hinted to me that—" And he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"That is indeed news," replied madonna. "I hope that the new baby will be a girl."

"Especially as the friar must be making much money and able to set aside an ample dowry."

Thus do parents count the chickens before they are hatched. Strange to say, in this case, the chicken turned out as fondly hoped for, and young Ciardi di Giovanni Ciardi eventually married Alessandra Lippi.

At the house in the Via delle Tre Gore, Lucrezia and Fra Filippo chatted together. Lucrezia was reading a letter. "Filippo," said she, looking up, "I have been invited to the Casa Sensi so that I may meet Spinetta and Sister Piera, and you are invited too."

"That is delightful," cried Fra Filippo. "For I dearly love Spinetta."

II

Through the summer and autumn, assisted by Fra Diamante, Fra Filippo had been working like one possessed. He had already completed the lunette of the Birth of Saint Stephen; he had finished the panel containing Episodes from the Life of Saint Stephen—here, I think, he had portrayed Carlo de' Medici as the bishop who was ordaining the young deacon, with Messers Spighi and Torricella as his assistants—and he had achieved a masterly exhibi-

tion of human fury in the panel of the Stoning of the Protomartyr. Now he was about to commence the final panel of the Funeral of Saint Stephen.

Already painters had come over from Florence to view the frescoes and were loud in their praises. The paintings were equal to those of Masaccio. The paintings were superior to those of Masaccio. "The spirit of Masaccio had entered the body of Fra Filippo." But it remained for Messer Leon Battista Alberti to put the final touch to the criticisms that were flying round.

During a fleeting visit to Prato he had been dining with Fra Filippo and Lucrezia and, thanks to the skill of Maddalena, the dinner had been admirable.

"Filippo," he said, as he munched some early chestnuts that Maddalena had preserved in candied honey, "men are saying that you are equaling or surpassing the work of Masaccio."

"That is true, Messer Leon Battista," broke in Lucrezia. "No one has ever toiled so hard or labored with such spirit as has my husband."

"It is possible to labor with too much spirit, madonna," replied Alberti, smiling.

"Then you would have him restrain his ardor and curb his genius?" cried Lucrezia, indignant.

Alberti replied with a leading question. "How many emotions would you say are expressed in human action?"

"Dante says," she answered, "that 'Six passions are proper to the human Soul, namely, Grace, Zeal, Mercy, Envy, Love, and Shame; and with whichever of these the Soul is impassioned, there comes into the window of the Eyes the semblance of it,

unless it be repressed within and shut from view by great power of will.' I should add the passion of Anger; but Dante would ascribe anger to a choleric disposition."

"There are also the emotions expressed in graceful motion and dignified restraint."

"That is true," acknowledged Lucrezia.

"Now, in his frescoes, your husband has expressed all the emotions that you have named most adequately. He has also expressed the perfection of graceful motion in the Dancing of Salome. There remains only——?"

"Dignified restraint!" cried Fra Filippo. "Masaccio's paintings were calm and full of dignity, whereas I am restless and full of action."

Lucrezia helped herself to chestnuts and ate in silence; Fra Filippo helped himself to wine and listened eagerly. For, although an artist is very impatient of gratuitous, outside criticisms, he is very appreciative of the criticisms of a real expert.

"Suppose you could fill in that last panel, Filippo, with a picture that was full of the spirit of quiet dignity," suggested Alberti, "then the shade of Masaccio would have to look to his laurels."

"I had planned a display of overwhelming grief at the funeral of the Saint," answered the friar; "but now, after what you have said, I must reconsider the question."

"You tell me that you had planned to paint Carlo de' Medici in this fresco," argued the critic. "I cannot see Carlo de' Medici writhing in a paroxysm of grief."

"And that shall be the secret of this panel," cried the painter. "I shall paint real, living persons, as

they bore themselves at the funeral of Messer Geminiano Inghirami. They were not"—he made a distasteful face—"writhing in paroxysms of grief then."

"And you propose to make each figure a portrait?" asked Alberti, struck with the simplicity of the method by which Fra Filippo proposed to overcome his tendency towards emotionalism.

"Yes," answered the friar: "for I remember how greatly the funeral of Messer Geminiano impressed me. Every one was calm, every one was dignified: only the women mourning beside the bier wept, because they were paid to do so. And yet every one loved the old *proposto*."

"The Christians round the bier of Saint Stephen would have been calm and triumphant," suggested Lucrezia, "because they knew that the martyr had entered into the joy of his Lord."

"And, when I come to think of it, dear one," said Fra Filippo, looking at her lovingly, "that was the exact reason why none wept at the funeral of the old *proposto*. For he was old and feeble and suffering when he died, and he longed for death greatly."

"But you have already, so you tell me, drawn the cartoon for this panel," objected Alberti who, although he could weep freely at the pathos of his own mental imagery, had but little patience with the emotionalism of others. "Surely you do not propose to draw the cartoon afresh?"

"That is as simple as shelling chestnuts," laughed Fra Filippo. "I have the cartoon drawn to the same scale as the picture, showing the Saint flanked on either side by a line of weeping figures. I shall

merely substitute portraits of living persons, drawn to the same scale, for the weeping figures. It will be very interesting and"—he paused—"very effective."

"Besides, Filippo," said Lucrezia, "you delight in painting the portraits of your friends."

The friar shrugged his shoulders expressively. "It is so much simpler than drawing from the model, since you have no model to get away from."

He glanced slyly at Lucrezia. "Besides," he argued, "Saint Peter was a prelate, and Messer Carlo de' Medici is a prelate, and I desire to draw a prelate officiating at the funeral; if I draw the soul of Messer Carlo I am drawing the soul of a prelate, which is much the same as drawing the soul of Saint Peter."

"Oh, you sophist!" mocked Lucrezia.

"Filippo seems to be laughing at some one," remarked Alberti, dryly.

But Fra Filippo was too busy making a small sketch of the proposed fresco to notice what Alberti was saying.

Within a classical basilica, drawn with great beauty of design and skill of perspective, lay the body of Saint Stephen. Beside the draped bier, as at the funeral of Messer Geminiano, crouched two professional mourning women, and a row of kneeling men were mourning at the feet of the body; but these were quite inconspicuous. Then, standing at the head of the Martyred Saint, were a group of the most dignified and noticeable officiating clergy, evidently persons of importance; and, standing at the foot of the Saint, were a second group of clergy who were only a degree less dignified and note-

worthy. The richly vested clergy on the right and left of the picture, all except one, were kept in due subordination by the drawing and arrangement; and the one arresting priest, standing a little in advance of the rest and catching the eye on account of his simple, flowing vesture, carried the attention right down to the body of the Saint.

"Who is the officiating priest?" asked Alberti.

"Either Saint Peter or Carlo de' Medici, take it as you will," answered the friar.

"And who is the distinguished priest standing immediately behind the head of Saint Stephen?"

"A quite unworthy man, one Fra Filippo Lippi, who is the painter of the picture."

"The priest standing at the foot of the Saint is more like you than the other."

"Ah! That is Fra Filippo as he may appear to men of mean intellect such as the Little Lion. The figure at the head is Fra Filippo as he may appear to those of true discernment such as Madonna Lucrezia."

"Then you have two personalities, my friend?" laughed Alberti.

"Every one has two personalities," replied Fra Filippo: "the personality which he shows to those who scoff at him, and the personality which he shows to those who love him; for those who scoff at him see him in one way, and those who love him in the other way."

"But you have made the figure at the head to look quite young!"

"To those who love me I am still young and comely, because the artist never grows old. To

those who scoff at my work, I am an old man that is past his work."

"Then the figure at the head, Filippo, must be your living image," said Alberti, drawing close to the friar so that he might embrace him. But Lucrezia was already there, her arm tight round her husband.

"Well," said Alberti, clearing his throat, "if you can render this drawing in fresco, it will be the crowning masterpiece of the painter for all generations."

"My Filippo is still young," said Lucrezia, softly, "and he will do even greater things than this."

But Fra Filippo kept silence, his heart too full for words; for he knew that, although this painting, if he could carry it to perfection, was the finest thing that had ever been done, there yet remained paintings on the spiritual side which might be infinitely higher.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"FRATER FILIPPUS. OP."

I

THERE were two great masterpieces that Fra Filippo achieved during the winter of 1464 and the spring of 1465, each of which was marked with his signature, the Funeral of Saint Stephen and Alessandra Lippi. The former work of art lives on the walls of the Duomo at Prato: the latter on the pictures which Botticelli painted in Florence. In the former the friar was assisted by the unskilful hands of Fra Diamante; in the latter by the supremely skilful person of Lucrezia. In the former Fra Diamante was responsible for the mourning women at the head and foot of the Saint's body; in the latter Fra Filippo and Lucrezia were co-workers and co-creators in the adorable girl who figures as the Venus of Botticelli and the Madonna di San Barnaba.

As to the Funeral of Saint Stephen, the fresco has the qualities of perfect decoration and intense dignity, qualities which are essential to a work of decorative religious art; and, although one cannot say that the picture is markedly devotional, yet the good Catholic does not want devotional art on the walls of his church any more than he wants devotional wallpaper on the walls of his bedroom or the missionary wants "moral pocket-handkerchiefs" in the

hands of his converts. What is desirable in religious decorative art is the combination of rest and dignity rather than emotionalism, and it is this combination that makes the work of Perugino so satisfying. When one finds the qualities of rest and dignity combined with the spirit of true devotion, as in the paintings of Fra Angelico and of Fra Filippo in his Spoleto frescoes, it is then, and then only, that religious decoration reaches absolute perfection.

Fra Filippo signed the Funeral of Saint Stephen, *Frater Filippus. Op.,* which, since the brush of Fra Filippo is visible in every figure except those of the mourning women, was entirely unnecessary. The signature of the graceful and modest Lucrezia is written all over the Birth of Venus and the Madonna di San Barnaba which Botticelli painted; the signature of Fra Filippo is clearly written in the mouth and eyes of both the Venus and Madonna. We have no other record of this delightful maiden except that Filippino's will, in which he leaves her the house in which she was born in the Via delle Tre Gore, describes her as the wife of *Ciardi Johannis Ciardi de villa Tabule.* But a comparison of the face of Botticelli's Venus with the portraits of Fra Filippo, Lucrezia and Filippino leaves no doubt that Alessandro Botticelli painted his namesake, Alessandra, in the Birth of Venus and the aforesaid Madonna, Sandro being about the age of forty-two and Sandra twenty-one.*

* See the author's *Romance of Sandro Botticelli* (Dodd, Mead & Co.), 1912.

II

As soon as Messer Leon Battista Alberti had left, Fra Filippo went over to his workshop and examined the sheets of the cartoon which he had prepared, finding to his great relief that his artistic instinct had kept the dignity of the mourners and that his impulsive mind had greatly exaggerated their display of emotion. Considering that he had always intended to paint the officiating clergy from direct portraits of Carlo de' Medici and his friends Spighi and Torricella, there would be but little to alter in the figures at the head of the bier; and the figures at the foot would need no great change. Then he set to work on the elaboration of details.

The figure at the back, standing between Messer Spighi and the *proposto,* had been but roughly drawn in. Now he resolved to portray the holy old priest who had heard the confessions of himself and Lucrezia. Next he examined the ecclesiastic in flowing white robes, standing behind the head of the Martyr, and was strengthened in his half-jesting threat that the figure should represent himself as seen by those who loved him.

"This shall be I, as I desire to be," he murmured, "young with the eternal youth of art, and fired with the purpose of begetting what is worthy of my art."

Lastly he turned to the figure at the foot of the Saint and, reaching down the mirror which he used for the reversal of his portraits, examined himself attentively. The mirror was not a good one and the reflection was most unattractive, and as the friar looked at his reflection he murmured:—

"This is I, as Tommaso Lippi the butcher begat

me and as I am by nature, the baseborn sinner that has loved women unworthily and broken the commandments of God." He addressed himself. "Miserable wretch that you are," he murmured, "unworthy panderer to your flesh and the parent of many unworthy pictures, see yourself as the mirror of truth reveals you!"

So he went home, determined to paint himself at the foot of the Martyred Saint exactly as he was by his fallen human nature, and also to paint himself at the head of the Saint as he hoped to be, by the mercy of the Papal dispensation, by the influence of Lucrezia, and most of all by the overwhelming grace of God. And he was very loving to Lucrezia and very tender with Filippino.

III

Next day, Fra Filippo started on the portrait of Canon Niccolao Spighi, who was delighted with his work, followed by the portraits of Messer Carlo de' Medici and Messer Paolo della Torricella. And, as these portraits were gradually transferred to the wall of the *pieve,* crowds thronged to inspect them, discuss them and criticize them. Then the portrait of Fra Filippo as he desired to be was painted and finished in two successive days.

"Who is it?" asked one.

"It is So-and-So," answered another.

"Body of Bacchus," cried the first, "the friar is an excellent portrait-painter, and this is no more like the man you name than the olive-tree is like the oak."

And thus the contention waxed furious, only Lu-

crezia realizing that this was the portrait of the soul of Fra Filippo as he earnestly desired to be. Lucrezia kept her secret, and the rest knew nothing about the painting of a soul. But the fact that the friar had painted the figure at the foot of the bier from his own portrait as seen in a mirror became the topic of common gossip. Many years after, Vasari heard the rumor and put it down in his *History of the Painters.*

The *pieve* frescoes were finished. The evening shadows had begun to lengthen when Lucrezia's baby was born. The father had been in agony during the confinement, and now he rested his head for a moment beside Lucrezia's.

"Beloved! Beloved!" he whispered. "I was frightened that God was going to take you and leave me alone. I should have died—"

"Eh!" whispered Maddalena, fiercely. "You ought to know enough not to excite her like that. Get you gone, Fra Filippo! Get you gone!"

The baby was called Alessandra after Sandro Botticelli, her godfather.

IV

During the next year, Fra Diamante, now a Camaldolese, was appointed chaplain of the Convent of Santa Margherita, and Fra Filippo painted two panels for the Fathers of San Domenico. One of these panels has been lost; but the other, a panel of the Nativity, is in the Municipal Museum at Prato. It shows a delightful Lucrezia as the Madonna, and Fra Diamante as San Vincenzo Ferreri.

Early in 1467 Botticelli left Fra Filippo in order

to complete his artistic training in the workshop of the Pollaiuoli in Florence. And, in the late spring of the same year, Fra Filippo packed up his traps and started, with Lucrezia and her children, Diamante and Jacopo, for Spoleto; for he had to commence the decoration of the cathedral without delay.

"Maddalena will keep our house ready for our return," said Lucrezia as she and her husband discussed their movements.

"Then you want to return to Prato, my loved one?" asked Fra Filippo, smiling.

"Yes!" answered Lucrezia, firmly. "For it is our home and people have been kind to us."

So they started for Spoleto and, since Vasari does not tell us that they met with robbers or pirates by the way, to be released on Fra Filippo painting the robber chief's portrait, we must assume that they reached their destination without adventure.

CHAPTER XXIX

OUR LADY OF TEARS

I

ON the road which leads from Trevi to Spoleto, with the ancient Teutonic citadel of Spoleto standing out upon a spur of Monteluco above it, there stands a house. It is an ancient house with solid walls and, upon the outer wall that faces the road, the owner, one Diotallevio d'Antonio, in an access of piety, had painted a picture of our Lady holding the Divine Child. This was a crude enough painting; but, nevertheless, it was inspired by an ardent piety that was entirely disinterested. "If our dear Lady will move those that pass by to sorrow for their sins, and if she will take pity on their troubles, I shall not have labored in vain," prayed Diotallevio d'Antonio.

Fra Diamante rode by, accompanied by Jacopo, hot to reach his journey's end. Then came Lucrezia carrying Alessandra and, a hundred yards behind her, for his rupture was worrying him on this last stage from Foligno, rode Fra Filippo with Filippino.

Lucrezia was all for pressing on to Spoleto; but Fra Filippo in his physical pain cast his eye on the painted Madonna, praying for pity. The painting was crude enough but, since the secret of true devotion lies in the eyes of him who looks rather than in the intrinsic value of the painted image, the friar

thought that he had never seen a face which was more full of the beauty of compassion.

Then—this may have been due to his own intense weariness or it may have been due to the slanting light of the setting sun or to some other natural or supernatural cause—it seemed to Fra Filippo that tears welled up in our Lady's eyes and ran down her cheeks.

For a moment he sat, spell-bound; then, calling to Lucrezia, he scrambled off his mule and knelt down. Lucrezia rode back, saw the same effect of tears, and knelt down beside her husband; and the owner of the house, who had heard Fra Filippo calling and had come out, looked at the painting and, seeing what appeared to be falling tears, knelt beside Fra Filippo and Lucrezia. Finally Diotallevio, remembering that his first duty to travelers and pilgrims was that of hospitality, brought out food and wine and begged them to partake.

It was a delightfully scriptural scene which could only have happened in a country where faith ran strong, and was very edifying. Unfortunately they all accepted the miracle without any attempt to verify it. In fact they accepted it in the same spirit as that in which the people of Prato had accepted the legend of the Holy Girdle.

"At first I thought," said Fra Filippo, as he and Lucrezia rode onward, "that our Lady was weeping with pity at my pain."

"Is your pain bad, beloved one?" asked Lucrezia, anxiously.

"'Tis better now," answered the friar, smiling. "Well, as I said, at first I thought that our Lady was weeping at my pain; but, as I looked at her

eyes, I knew that she was weeping with sorrow at the sin which once we had wrought at Prato."

"But that has been long forgiven, Filippo," said Lucrezia.

"Yet our Lady's compassion for us sinners still remains," answered Fra Filippo, and they let it go at that.

Thus, refreshed by the miracle, Fra Filippo rode into Spoleto full of the task that had been set him, and determined to adorn the Cathedral of Spoleto with the History of our Lady most worthily.

II

For several months Fra Filippo wrestled with the initial difficulty of arranging his composition on a sanctuary which ended in the half-cupola of an apse. How perfectly and completely he solved the difficulty his frescoes, in spite of the damp and ill-skilled restoration, bear witness.

In an ethereal heaven, thronged with lovely angels and dignified saints, is the throne of the Almighty Father. Before Him kneels our Lady, wonderful and mystical, and God is in the act of placing a crown upon her head. The angelic host are not here flying like Dante's "swarm of bees"; but, surrounding the Throne of God with their celestial throng, they strew mystical flowers before the Mother of our Lord.

The decoration of the half-cupola was a terrific task for an injured man and the act of reaching upward to paint above his head tried him sorely; but, each evening when he had finished work, he would ride with Lucrezia to the house on the road to Trevi

so that he might watch the setting sun shining upon the painting of our Lady of Tears.

Sometimes Lucrezia would talk with him, sometimes she would read aloud to him from *Il Paradiso*. When she neared the end of the *Divine Comedy*, she came to a passage which referred to Beatrice:—

"If all her beauty that my skill hath shown
Could be included in a single phrase,
E'en then the perfect truth would not be known.
Not only doth the fairness which I praise
Surpass all other; but I do maintain
That God alone beholds her without 'maze.
For, as the sun's great glory makes sight vain,
So doth the memory of her radiant smile
Confuse and puzzle any earthly brain."

"And that was what used to trouble me when I painted you as the Madonna, Lucrezia," said Fra Filippo. "For each picture of you that I painted was quite unlike all the other pictures of you that I had painted, and no single picture of you was like you really are nor one half so lovely in spirit."

She flushed happily and, turning back for a few pages in the book, read:—

"'And if or Art or Nature had laid snare
To catch the eye and so possess the thought,
In either human flesh or portrait fair,
Or if both joined together, 'twould be nought
Compared with that delight which shone on me
When, turning, her sweet smile at last I caught.'"

"Is that what you mean, Filippo?" she asked.

"It is what I am now trying to paint in the Coronation of our Lady," he answered, humbly.

And such is the Madonna that Fra Filippo must have tried to paint on the apse of Spoleto Cathedral, to be restored and painted out of all recognition by the hand of the abominable restorer.

Then, when Fra Filippo had painted the whole of the left side of the composition, including the Eternal Father and our kneeling Lady, the tragedy happened.

The friar had started his morning's work in the best of spirits, full of plans to finish the angels on the right hand side of the picture even more worthily than he had painted those on the left, and he was stretching up to put the finishing touches to our Lady's face, when he felt a stabbing pain inside him that was even worse than the pain he had felt at the time of his torture.

They helped him down from the scaffolding and they helped him home and they fetched a surgeon: but, with all the surgeon's indifferent skill and with all Lucrezia's devoted nursing, Fra Filippo could never mount the scaffolding to complete his vision of heaven.

"And that was the reason why Santa Maria delle Lagrime wept when I first passed her," sighed Fra Filippo. "For she knew that I would never be able to complete the Court of Heaven of which she was to reign as Queen."

III

During the summer of 1468, Fra Filippo used to limp over to the Duomo so that he might watch and direct Diamante in his work on the apse: and, thanks to his direction and Diamante's best efforts, the fresco was finished none too badly. But, alas,

for the gulf that separated the work of the great master from that of his assistant, the figures on the left hand of the apse from those on the right!

And, yet, Fra Diamante was not able to kill the magnificent conception which the soul of Fra Filippo had conceived, and the supreme work still looks down from the apse of Spoleto Cathedral as the greatest and most spiritual vision of Paradise which mortal mind has begat and mortal hand materialized.

More than a hundred years later, and before the restorer had done his worst, Vasari saw this fresco in its still glowing colors. He had come from Rome with the work of Michelangelo and the glories of the Vatican still fresh in his mind; but, when he saw Fra Filippo's Coronation of our Lady, he cried: "What a beautiful thing! Truly the friar was a great man!"

By the autumn of 1468 Fra Filippo, by leaving most of the work to Fra Diamante, was able to paint a little of the three frescoes which adorn the sanctuary walls. He left the whole of the Nativity to his assistant, who painted the ox and ass superbly; but he certainly painted the simple and most graceful Gabriel in the Annunciation and prepared the cartoon of the whole, and his hand is apparent in the Death of our Lady in the central compartment of the fresco. For, in the Death of our Lady, the dignified position of our Lady's body, without any pomp and without any halo, and the dignified restraint of the Apostles' grief, reminds us strongly of the Funeral of Saint Stephen at Prato.

On October 9th, 1469, when he was engaged on his last fresco of the Death of our Lady, Fra

Filippo felt a fierce stabbing pain and, before they could fetch Lucrezia, he died. Truly, as Vasari says, he was a great man, great in his sin, great in his repentance and supremely great in his art.

They clothed him in his Carmelite habit and buried him in a tomb of red and white marble close to the Duomo door. In the list of the dead for 1469, which was kept in the Carmine, we read:

"On the ninth of October, F. Filippus Thomæ Lippi de Lippis, of Florence, the most famous painter, died at Spoleto where he was painting the chief chapel of the Cathedral Church, and there was buried with the greatest honour in a marble tomb beside the central door of the church. So rare was his grace in painting, that scarcely any other painter came near him in our time: how great a painter he was, the chapel of Prato and many other marvellous works bear witness. MCCCCLXVIIII."

CHAPTER XXX

IN MEMORY OF FRA FILIPPO

I

ABOUT two years after Fra Filippo's death, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Cosimo de' Medici's grandson and now the virtual ruler of Florence, was journeying to Rome in order to congratulate Pope Sixtus the Fourth on his accession to the Papal Chair. He might have traveled by Pisa and the sea as he did when he visited Naples some ten years later, he might have traveled by the direct overland route through Sienna, Aquapendente and Viterbo; but, instead of taking either of these ways, he went through Perugia and Spoleto, for he had decided to go to Spoleto so that he might ask leave to remove the remains of the friar for their reinterment in the Cathedral Church of Florence.

"The Spoletians replied," says Vasari, "that they were poorly provided with ornaments, and they could boast of but few excellent men; they consequently begged permission as a favor to retain the remains of Fra Filippo, that they might honor themselves therewith, adding, that since the Florentines possessed so many great men as almost to have a superfluity, they might be content without this one."

But, although he had failed in his original purpose, the memory of the Medici was long and his determination to do honor to "the rarest master of

our times" was fixed; so, as soon as Filippino Lippi had reached the full power of his talent and was about to set out for Rome, Lorenzo sent for him and bade him design and make arrangements for the erection of a monument that would be worthy of his father's memory.

"What nature of a monument do you desire, magnificence?" asked Filippino.

"A marble wall-vault which may contain your father's remains, inscribed with a fitting elegy from the pen of Poliziano," replied Lorenzo, who had very determined ideas of what was fitting in art, "surmounted by a portrait bas-relief of Fra Filippo in his friar's habit which should be flanked by the lilies of Florence. Bring the design to me, and spare no expense."

"But, alas, magnificence," replied Filippino, "I was but twelve when my father died and cannot remember his features clearly."

"Then go to Sandro Botticelli and ask him to help you," said Lorenzo. "He was well over twenty before he left your father and must have many drawings of him. Besides I have already spoken of the matter to Sandro."

So first Filippino went to Politian and demanded the eulogium. And after many grumbles at the calls on his Muse—"One teases me for catches and drinking-songs," he grumbled, "another for a grave discourse, a third for a serenade, and now Lorenzo demands an eulogium on Fra Filippo. Of a truth, there is hardly a wall I have not besmeared, like a snail, with the effusions of my brain." Nevertheless, he promised to send the elegy as soon as he could compose it. Then Filippino went to his

friend who had first taught him his art, Sandro Botticelli.

Sandro set wine on the table in his studio and, bidding Filippino help himself, went over to a chest and began to rummage.

"Long ago," he explained, "when Lorenzo first proposed to erect a memorial to Fra Filippo, I put together some drawings." He dug deeper amongst his papers. "Ah, here they are!" he exclaimed. And he brought out a portfolio and laid it on the table.

"Here is my dear master drinking a glass of Chianti," he remarked, handing a drawing to Filippino. "Here he is playing with 'Sandra.'" He handed him another drawing. "Here he is in a temper; here he is talking to your mother; here he is working at the Funeral of Saint Stephen; and here he is as he must have been in his last days. The other drawings were made from life; but this last one was made from the other sketches and from memory. I drew it when Madonna Lucrezia wrote to me that he was dead and that they had buried him in his habit; but, since I could not bear to think of him as dead, I drew him, in his friar's dress, living."

"It is a veritable masterpiece!" cried Filippino.

"Very well," replied Sandro, "if you will design the monument, I will make a full-sized drawing of Fra Filippo ready for the sculptors to work from."

So Filippino set himself to draw a most worthy monument in the simplest manner; Sandro, who was now at the very height of his art, drew the living likeness of his much-loved master, enclosing the bust within a classical scallop-shell drawn from the very

shell which he was using for the Birth of Venus; and Politian sent in an eulogium couched in his perfect Latin. But, since Politian's elegy was done rather to please Lorenzo than out of love for the memory of Fra Filippo, the elegy was the least worthy of the three contributions.

II

The evening sun was low over Prato, and Lucrezia, Sandro and Filippino were gathered in the house where she and Fra Filippo had lived in the Via delle Tre Gore.

"So this is your father's monument, Filippino?" said Lucrezia, unfolding the drawing of the tomb, while she tried to keep the tears from coming into her eyes and into her voice.

"Yes, little mother," replied Filippino as he put his arm round her.

"Ah! This is very simple and very dignified and very beautiful. It is just what he would have loved. But the portrait that is to fill this space?" And she looked anxiously at the second drawing.

Sandro Botticelli unrolled the drawing, laying it flat on the table.

Lucrezia gave a gasp, and could not trust herself to speak; for the portrait had caught the very likeness of her husband, with all his ready wit, and charm, and genius, and ever-living youth, as she had always thought of him, and he seemed to be there before her eyes.

Presently she controlled herself.

"Sandro," she said, "you have made my Filippo what he was, brave and clever and generous and

every bit a man. And," she sank her voice, "you have made him more than this: you have made him good. No one who looks at this could doubt his goodness."

Sandro cleared his throat, but could say nothing.

"He sinned terribly," she went on, speaking in the same low voice, "—he and I—more terribly than any one who is not a religious can realize; but he repented with his whole heart, and cleansed his heart with his whole strength, and he painted out his heart in his last vision of heaven; and every one who sees your portrait will—must—see this. Now leave me for a little, my dear ones."

Filippino and Sandro went quietly out of the room; but, as he went, Sandro laid a smaller copy of the portrait upon the table for Lucrezia to cherish.

HISTORICAL BASIS OF "THE JOYOUS FRIAR"

I

THE function of the *biographical novel* is to reconstruct the life of a certain character so that he may live and move amidst the environment in which he did live and move. Therefore a real biographical novel must be founded on an accurate knowledge of the time and place in which the character lived, and of the people who lived at that time in that place.

Prato in the time of Fra Filippo, although it was in the diocese of Pistoja, was in the archdiocese of Florence, but ten miles from the City of Lilies, and the influence of Florence was overwhelming. And the Florence of the days of Fra Filippo was entirely different from the Florence at the beginning of the century, entirely different from the Florence under the influence of Savonarola and entirely different from the Florence at the beginning of the next century; much more was it different from the Milan, Venice or Rome of the same period. In fact, Florence in the days of Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici was Florence at its greatest and best.

Amongst contemporary historians, Guicciardini asserts that the government of Florence was the wisest and happiest that the city ever had; Bisticci

Photo by Bruckmann *Berlin Gallery*

THE NATIVITY
Formerly in the Chapel of the Medici Palace

adds that the city was full of excellent citizens; and Varchi tells us that "their mode of life is simple and frugal, but incredibly clean and neat," and that "the artisans and handicraftsmen live even better than the citizens themselves." The neighboring town of Prato was even quieter and more carefully governed, the *propostos* during Fra Filippo's time being men of singularly wise and prudent lives and the magistrates all that could be desired. So, when I describe the horror of the inhabitants at the abduction of a nun by a friar, I am not in the least overstating the case.

Then, again, we must take into consideration the great influence of Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici on the life in Florence and its neighborhood and on the lives of their contemporaries. For Cosimo was justly called "The Father of his Country," and Lorenzo was, contrary to the present popular ideas, one of the best, wisest and most unselfish rulers that the world has ever seen.

Then, once again, before we go further, we must touch on the two leading biographers of Fra Filippo. Vasari, in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* gives the first detailed account of Fra Filippo upon which all the subsequent lives are founded; Mr. Strutt has written the fullest and most recent biography. As an artist Vasari was a poor painter but a most excellent critic; as a biographer he was so profoundly unreliable about those painters who lived outside his own period that we cannot believe a single word he says without supporting evidence. On the other hand, Mr. Strutt is not conspicuous for his artistic knowledge, whilst he is so swayed by Vasari's esti-

mate of the moral character of the persons about whom he writes that he cannot speak of Fra Angelico without bubbling over with praise, nor of Fra Filippo without attributing the worst imaginable motives to all his actions. When he is not damning Fra Filippo with faint praise or damning him altogether, he is praising him with faint damns.

II

The novel opens with the "abduction" of Sister Lucrezia de' Buti by Fra Filippo, and at once we find ourselves in a puzzle; for, in the May of 1456, we find that five out of eight nuns of Santa Margherita left their convent and, except Lucrezia and Spinetta de' Buti, all trace of them vanishes until they return to their convent in the winter of 1458. Mr. Strutt, who has a nose like a ferret for possible conventual vice, suggests that Fra Filippo abducted the whole five of them and, basing his conjecture on the mistakes in the anonymous accusation of 1461, makes the unpleasant suggestion that Fra Filippo had immoral relations with Spinetta as well as with Lucrezia. Those, on the other hand, who know something about the lax enforcement of enclosure before the Council of Trent, suggest that three of the rebellious nuns simply left the convent and went to their own homes and that Lucrezia and Spinetta, who had no homes available, found refuge in the empty house which Fra Filippo had on his hands in the Via delle Tre Gore. That there was no immoral relation between Fra Filippo and Spinetta is absolutely certain, otherwise Canon Law would have prevented the Pope from allowing Fra

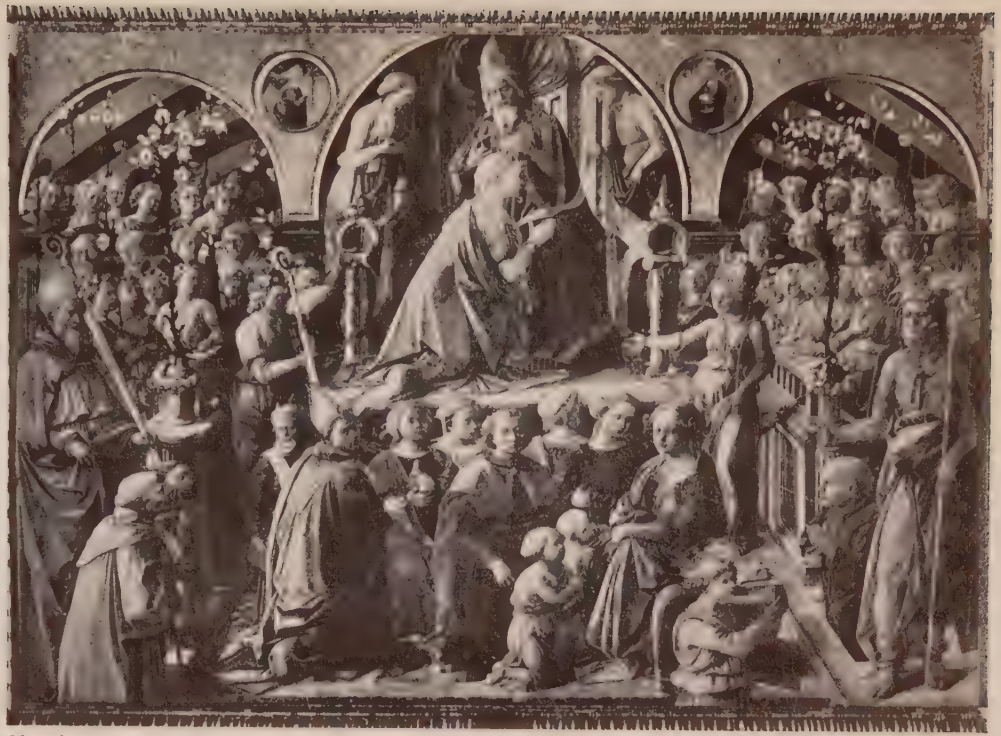

Photo by Anderson *The Academy, Florence*

THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN
Formerly in Sant' Ambrogio

Filippo and Lucrezia to contract marriage in 1461. A man cannot marry the sister of his mistress.

Basing my presumption on the fact that Filippino was not born until Lucrezia had left the convent sixteen months, I am justified in my assumption that the unwise friendship between her and Fra Filippo began innocently, and that their relation did not become guilty until nine or ten months before the baby was born. Basing my presumption on the fact that Lucrezia did not have a second baby until she was properly married and also that she returned to her convent as soon as the baby was old enough to be left, I am justified in my assumption that Lucrezia repented of her sin after Filippino was born. And now we are met with another problem which is not so easy to solve.

There is no result without a cause, and what was the probable cause of the five nuns breaking enclosure?

That the five nuns were abducted by Fra Filippo, as Mr. Strutt suggests? No! For that would be a case of five nuns abducting one friar, and that must be ruled outside the bounds of probability.

That the five nuns were forced to leave the convent in order to escape the tyranny of a cruel abbess? No! For the abbess was having the Madonna della Cintola painted as the thanksgiving for a happy and prosperous rule.

That, in 1456, the Lady Abbess, who died in the same year, had become too ill to perform her duties and that a deputy, who enforced her authority by nagging and petty tyranny, had taken her place? That is nearer the mark! For, after the most careful enquiries about communities of women,

whether lay or religious, I find that nothing can raise the spirit of discontent and rebellion so quickly and surely as the girding and interference of a weak superior who is a disciplinarian at heart and who is anxious to enforce her authority. As long as a strong superior is in active command, a weak and conscientious second-in-command may be fairly satisfactory; but, when a weak second-in-command has to assume authority, her weakness and the consciousness of her weakness become fatal.

Having decided this point, who was the temporary superior? It could not have been Sisters Piera di Vanni Sensi, Simona di Michele Lottieri, Brigida d'Antonio Peruzzi, Lucrezia or Spinetta de' Buti; neither, since the recreant nuns returned as soon as she had been made abbess, could it have been Sister Jacopa de' Bovacchiesi, nor of course could it have been the Abbess Bartolommea. Therefore it must have been the seventh nun whose name is not recorded, and I have made this nun the mother prioress and have suffered her to remain anonymous.

III

After his "abduction" of Lucrezia, Fra Filippo continued to be in good repute with the ecclesiastical authorities until his sin was denounced by the anonymous accusation, and then he was treated with exemplary severity. How could this have been? The undoubted answer is that the gossip of Prato could have known nothing about the "abduction" until the accusation was lodged, and, in order to show how this might have happened, I have created the romantic Maddalena and her husband. They are per-

Photo by Anderson *Pitti Gallery, Florence*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD
Painted for Bartolini

fectly possible characters and in perfect keeping with the age, and the situation is the most probable that I can imagine.

The explanation of the reason why Fra Filippo continued to act as chaplain to Santa Margherita after Lucrezia had returned to the convent goes without argument. If the bishop and the abbess had known about Fra Filippo's conduct with Lucrezia, and had allowed him to continue in his office, their conduct is not only foolish but incredibly foolish. But, if Fra Filippo, conscious of the purity of his intention and desirous of avoiding a complete separation from Lucrezia, had kept his share in the matter dark and had continued in his post, his behavior is nothing more than the stupid behavior of an impetuous man who has let his heart run away with his head. The conduct of Lucrezia, anxious to keep in touch with her baby, is equally understandable.

Maddalena, her husband and the prioress are the only fictitious characters that I have introduced into the novel, and the historical characters are true to what we know of their lives. I have given the author of the anonymous accusation the name of Antonio di Matteo and called his wife Maria; but then he must have had a name and most probably a wife.

The legend of the miraculous painting of Santa Maria delle Lagrime, our Lady of Tears, is authentic, and a chapel was built on the site in 1485 in which Mass was said daily. That Fra Filippo saw this assumed miracle is, of course, fictitious.

IV

And now we come to the most important point of the whole, that of Fra Filippo's acceptance of the Papal dispensation and of the entire reform of his life.

Unlike the ordinary photographer who photographs only the outward appearance of his subject, the artist paints from the subconscious a persistent idea of his subject which lies deep down in his mind and tinges all his work. Even though he may paint his figures from the living model, the painted image of these figures conforms to the idea of the subject which he has pictured in his mind. That is why, in spite of his overwhelming talent, the religious pictures of the easy, pleasure-loving, amorous Raphael are so unsatisfying; and that is why, in spite of his inferior talent, the religious pictures of the saintly Fra Angelico are so satisfying. For an artist cannot paint more than is in his mind, and, if he has not true piety, he cannot express it.

I do not say that a weak and second-rate artist cannot spur his imagination into spurious piety, but a strong man, and Fra Filippo was essentially a strong man, cannot paint a religious picture that will carry any conviction unless he be deeply and interiorly religious.

So, when Mr. Strutt and like critics, basing their opinion on Vasari's *Lives,* which is so largely inaccurate and fictitious, suggest that Fra Filippo refused to avail himself of the Pope's dispensation because he desired "to retain the power of living after his own fashion and of indulging his love of pleasure as might seem good to him," and, so, con-

The Duomo, Prato

Photo by Alinari

DANCING OF THE DAUGHTER OF HERODIAS

tinuing to live in sin, died impenitent, they show themselves entirely ignorant of the elementary laws of psychology.

Well, a man who is neither hot nor cold is no earthly good in religious art or anything else; but a man who has rebelled against God and is afterwards reconciled becomes his most loyal and devoted servant, and this is the whole of the secret of Fra Filippo's religious art and, consequently, of his life.

He began his career as a religious man and painted pictures with interior conviction though with inferior art, instance the Nativity which is now in the Berlin Gallery (see page 300), and other pictures of this period. He went out into the gay world of Florence, became irreligious and possibly immoral, and painted pictures like the Sant' Ambrogio Coronation (see page 301), which are full of technical skill and artistic beauty but entirely devoid of religious feeling. Then, after attempts at a better life, during which he painted the Pitti Madonna (see page 304), and the opening Prato frescoes, and part of the Madonna della Cintola (see page 308), he fell into his sin with Lucrezia and could accomplish nothing that is higher than the Madonna which is now in the Uffizi Gallery (see page 309). Finally he accepted the mercy of God in the right spirit, painted the Funeral of Saint Stephen (see page 312) and ended with the Spoleto Coronation (see page 313). The heavenly vision of the Spoleto Coronation is quite as spiritual and quite as devotional as any painting that Fra Angelico ever painted, while it shows a far higher type of artistic skill.

Lastly let us turn to the records to prove our contention. From the time when he left the Carmine and went into the world—that is to say, during his Florentine period—he broke God's laws, was in continual war with the ecclesiastical authorities and in perpetual lawsuits over financial matters. But, from the time of the Papal dispensation, we do not find a single record of ecclesiastical censure or of monetary troubles or of anything that fails to cast the highest credit on Fra Filippo's character.

V

Of the reputed portraits of Fra Filippo, there is but one that is undoubtedly authentic—that of his monument at Spoleto. For this monument was ordered and approved by Lorenzo de' Medici, who knew him well, and was designed by his son, Filippino.

But who drew the actual bust-portrait for this monument? It could scarcely have been Filippino, who was only just twelve when his father died; besides the portrait is too masterly and virile to be a memory-portrait from the hands of Filippino whose "heads have a gentle and sweet air." * On the other hand it might well have been drawn by Botticelli, who worked under Fra Filippo until he was twenty-three years of age and who must have made many drawings of his master. In 1487 Botticelli was in the very height of his power, in close friendship with *Il Magnifico* and in closer friendship with Filippino, and he must have taken an intense interest in the monument. Besides "his figures have a manly air and are admirable in conception and

* See footnote on p. 309.

Municipal Palace, Prato

THE MADONNA DELLA CINTOLA
Formerly in the Convent of Santa Margherita

proportion," * as in the Spoleto monument. So I have made Filippino design the monument and Sandro Botticelli draw the portrait, which was probably what happened.

In an article which appeared in the *Month* of June, 1911, Mr. Montgomery Carmichael has proved beyond the possibility of contention that the reputed portrait of the friar in the Sant' Ambrogio Coronation is in reality the portrait of the Very Reverend Francesco Maringhi, Canon of San Lorenzo, who paid for the altarpiece and endowed the altar. This mistake in identity occurred through the canon having been labeled by Fra Filippo with a scroll bearing the words, IS PERFECIT OPUS —"This is the man who caused the work to be done"—and art critics having regarded the inscription as though it were, IS FECIT OPUS—"This man did the work"—jumped at the idea that this fat old secular priest, who was at least thirty years older than Fra Filippo was at the time, was intended for the friar. Any Latin scholar would have explained the difference between *perfecit* and *fecit*, and the mistake is inexcusable. The original frame, bearing the inscription, *Ab hujus ecclesiæ prior Francesco Maringhi an. MCCCCXLI facta, et a monialibus ornata fuit an. MDLXXXV* was placed in the sacristy by a later prior and was seen by Mgr. Bottari, who has recorded the fact.

Consequently, thinking that the kindly, commonplace face of the old canon was that of the "licentious friar," the art critics have said frightful things

* Both the foregoing quotations are taken from a letter which the Florentine envoy wrote to Ludovico, Duke of Milan, in which letter he compares the work of Botticelli with that of Filippino.

about it, labeling it "coarse and vulgar . . . bespeaking a passionate, pleasure-loving temperament." (*Mr. Strutt.*) "His portrait shows us a flat-nosed individual with a jesting, but vicious-looking, thick-lipped, sensual face." (*M. Gilett, Catholic Encyclopedia.*) Which is rather hard on Canon Maringhi, who is described as a man of the "highest integrity and piety," and who has, in reality, a kindly, conscientious, though perhaps fussy, expression.

Mr. Carmichael goes on to speak of the Spoleto bust:—"What a fascinating face it is! And how totally different a type from the supposed portrait in the Sant' Ambrogio Coronation. Mr. Strutt is justly astonished to think what he calls the 'coarse-featured, decidedly obese, most unsentimental personage' in the Coronation should have been able, some fifteen years after the picture was painted, to fascinate completely a young and beautiful professed nun, and cause her to be unfaithful to her solemn obligations. But looking at the Spoleto bust we see at once that we are in the presence of a man with whom youth was perennial, whose ready wit, and charm, and genius would fascinate anybody at any age. And I would also read into that open, ardent, radiant countenance, that if the lowest depths were often touched, the greatest heights were more dearly loved, that remorse and repentance were by no means unknown, and that he had experienced more than once the change of heart and life which would go so naturally with the exquisite purity of his Madonnas and the lofty spirituality of his angels and of his saints."

Mr. Carmichael also says: "Had I been tempted

Photo by Anderson *Uffizi Gallery*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH TWO ANGELS
Painted for Giovanni de' Medici

to see Fra Filippo in the Sant' Ambrogio altarpiece, it would have been in that handsome Carmelite Saint in the upper row on the Gospel side." I agree with him, for the Carmelite in the Coronation is a younger version of the Carmelite of the Spoleto monument.

VI

Since Catholics in America and England will turn naturally to "LIPPI, Filippo" in the generally excellent volumes of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and, since they might be expected to regard its contents as authoritative, it is necessary to warn them that the article on Fra Filippo Lippi from the pen of M. Louis Gilett is remarkably full of errors. In fact I have never met with an article that contains so many mistakes and misstatements.

To start with, M. Gilett gives as an illustration of the friar's paintings an Annunciation that was painted by Filippino Lippi at least twenty years after his father's death and that is, consequently, in another period of the Renaissance. Then he goes on to elaborate with a hostile pen a perfect tissue of inaccuracies and innuendos. For instance, he writes:

"At length, despite his evil reputation, Lippi succeeded in having himself appointed chaplain to a convent of Augustinians. Here his misbehaviour was no less flagrant than elsewhere. It is significant and shows plainly what were the ideas of the Renaissance that Lippi was not punished for his bad conduct. Glory of genius then constituted a soil of privilege and a warrant of impunity. Talent placed its possessor beyond and above the moral law. Not only did Cosimo de' Medici make merry over what he called

the 'folly of the frater' (Letter of J. de Medici, 27 May, 1458), but Pope Pius II thought he could do no better than to release him from his vows and permit him to marry. A son, Filippino Lippi, had already been born to him. He afterwards had a daughter (1458). In the midst of these intrigues and disorders Filippo continued to paint his greatest works."

The first sentence, which shows the author's animus against Fra Filippo, suggesting that he plotted and planned to secure his appointment, has absolutely no confirmation from fact: all we can say is that Lippi was appointed chaplain. Does not M. Gilett call the suspension of a chaplain from his post and the order which forbade him to enter the convent door (1461) punishment? And what further punishment can he suggest? In Fra Filippo's time talent did not "place" a painter "beyond and above the moral law," and he has no right to make such a statement. Giovanni de' Medici's letter to Bartolommeo Scala has nothing on earth to do with the venerable Cosimo de' Medici, nor is there any reason to suppose that Giovanni's *"et cosi dello errore di Fra Filippo naviamo riso un pezzo"* refers to the friar's "abduction" of Lucrezia. Pope Pius II did not grant the dispensation to Fra Filippo because of his talent, but because he desired that the scandal should cease—it was the only way to end it. Fra Filippo did not continue to "paint his greatest works" during the intrigue; in fact he dropped the Prato frescoes from the time he "abducted" Lucrezia until more than two years after the dispensation had been granted. But I have said enough to show that M. Gilett is a most unreliable historian. My excuse for treating him at

Photo by Alinari *The Duomo, Prato*

FUNERAL OF SAINT STEPHEN

such length is that an article in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* is apt to carry undue weight.

VII

Except that she continued to live on Fra Filippo's property, we know but little of Lucrezia after her husband's death. She married Alessandra to "Ciardi Johannis Ciardi de villa Tabule"; and Filippino's will, dated 1504 and expressing tender affection for his mother, left her amply provided for, so she must have been living when the will was made.

Filippino Lippi and Sandro Botticelli reflected great credit on the artistic training of their master in their paintings, and on the influence of both Fra Filippo and Lucrezia in their stainless lives. Diamante was living in 1498, quarreling with, and being imprisoned by, his religious superiors.

Although the granting of the Papal dispensation has never been questioned, there are two sets of documents which are required to establish beyond dispute my version of the lives of Fra Filippo and Lucrezia. There must have been some written brief, dispensing Fra Filippo from his religious vows and permitting him to marry Lucrezia. This should be sought for among the archives in Florence, Prato or Pistoja, or it may be found among the personal papers of some descendant of Lippi. The Italians, even the very poor, are most careful of family documents. Again, Botticelli certainly had a most extraordinary love for Dante. If it can be proved that Lucrezia's father, Francesco de' Buti of Florence, who was born in 1372 and died

in 1450, was nearly related to Francesco de' Buti the commentator, who was lecturing at Pisa Academy in 1384, then Sandro's early love of the poet, derived through Lucrezia, will be explained.

VIII

The Pitti Madonna is undoubtedly the first portrait of Lucrezia that Fra Filippo painted. The Uffizi Madonna is a portrait of the same girl, but here Lucrezia's face is saddened and worn by the consciousness of her sin with the friar. In the Madonna della Cintola, Fra Filippo did not finish the picture and the figure of our Lady of the Girdle was painted by Fra Diamante; but the figure of Saint Margaret, which was painted by Fra Filippo, was certainly painted from the same model that posed for the Pitti and Uffizi Madonnas. This Saint Margaret has a very tender and beautiful personality, which was repeated in some of the Madonnas by Filippino (instance in the Vision of Saint Bernard) and also by Botticelli, so Lucrezia de' Buti has her own distinctive place in the religious art of the Quattrocento.

As an Augustinian Canoness, Sister Lucrezia must have been exceptionally lovely. Picture a tall, graceful girl, clothed in a white serge habit with a narrow-sleeved, fine-linen rochet coming down to her knees. Her face was surrounded by a white linen whimple and binder, and her head covered by a black veil. In winter she would have worn a full, black mantle as part of her choir dress. From old Italian prints, the dress is exactly the same as that

Photo by Anderson *The Duomo, Spoleto*

CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

worn by the Canoness Regular of the Lateran at the present day.

IX

Since *terza rima* is absolutely essential to the swing and flow of Dante's poetry, to the general sense of movement and to the carrying on of his arguments, I have endeavored to render the quotations from *The Divine Comedy* into this measure. But I sadly acknowledge in the words of Dante: "that nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muse can be translated from its own language into another, without breaking all its sweetness and harmony." *Il Convito, I, VIII.*

THE END

DATE DUE

NOV 15 1940

MAR 10 1949

MAR 24 '49

MAR 3- 1950

MAR 11 1964

FEB 23 1965

MAR 12 1965

OCT 20 1970

JUL. 12 1983

STORAGE

Anderson, Arthur J.

The Joyous Friar